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Issued Semi-Monthly.



# THE OUTCAST OF MILAN

BY SYLVANUS COBB, JR.

A Companion Story to "The Gunmaker  
of Moscow."

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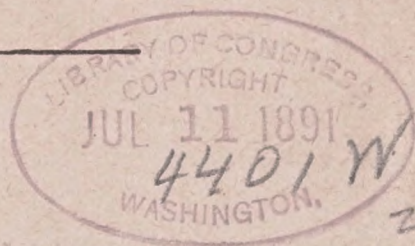




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A Companion Story to "The Gun-  
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BY  
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NEW YORK:  
ROBERT BONNER'S SONS,  
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# THE OUTCAST OF MILAN.

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## CHAPTER I.

THE ROBBER KNIGHTS.—THE OUTCAST'S STORY.



THE tenth century was drawing to a close, and the monarchs of Europe were taking a respite from the labors of war and conquest. Petty princes were lifting their heads into notice, and the knights of Christendom, who sought only honorable combat, were resting upon their arms, but all knights were not thus quiet. Many there were who, with no other use for their weapons, betook themselves to the darker passes of the highways, and turned robbers.

Towards the close of a pleasant day in mid-summer, a young man sat alone upon the green-sward,



beneath an olive tree, not many miles north of Milan. It was a lovely spot—a vast garden of tree and shrub, with fruit and flowers, with here an open space, and there a dense, shadowy thicket of dark-leaved trees. Close at hand was the highway, but for more than an hour no traveller had stirred the dust of the beaten track. The man to whom we have alluded could not have been more than two-and-twenty years of age, though his frame had reached the proportions and developments of athletic vigor. He was not taller than the average height of men, but when he stood erect, so straight and comely was he, and such a breadth of shoulders and such a swell of bosom did he present, that the eye, taking its cue from his evident strength of nerve and muscle, gave him proportions of frame beyond his real measure. His face was somewhat bronzed by exposure, but his features were regular and handsome, and his eye, large and full, looked out with a soft, liquid light, seeming almost tearful when resting from the call of passion. His hair was very dark—almost black—and hung in wavy masses over his shoulders, while upon his lip curled a graceful moustache. His dress was soiled and much worn. The hose, which had once been a fawn-colored silk, had grown to a dingy brown; the shirt, once white and fair, was stained and crumpled; and the doublet of blue velvet, slashed with white and crimson, and edged with gold, had lost its newness, and in more than one place some of its fabric was missing. His hat was looped up upon one side by a silver brooch, which held the remains of a much abused ostrich plume.



A faded red sash confined his shirt about the loins, also holding his sword-scarf in its place.

The youth arose from his recumbent posture, and gazed about him.

"Where to-night?" he muttered, in a half mournful tone. He took out his purse—a net-work of silk and gold—and held it up between his eye and the horizon. "Empty—the last denier gone! For my bed the warm earth will answer, but this body of mine will not thrive upon fruits and herbs. I must have bread and meat. And my poor garments—they will not stand me much longer. This is my only possession which moth doth not corrupt."

As he thus spoke he drew his sword from its scabbard, and gazed upon it with a fond look. The blade was long and stout, as bright as when first it came from the hand of its maker, and evidently of the finest metal. The hilt was of silver, inlaid with flowers of gold, and in the pommel was set a pure carbuncle of rare brilliancy and large size.

"As yet," he said, still gazing upon his weapon, "thou hast never been drawn in a dishonorable cause, but how long it shall be so God only knows. I must either turn my heart away from Milan, and bid farewell to the home of my birth, or I must find some means of sustenance where honor stands not in the way. If I join the robber knights I may do more than find bread and meat—I may find some means of revenge upon my enemy. O, Saint Ambrose help me in this strait. My father's son must not come to dishonor!"

As he ceased speaking he cast his eye to the north-



ward, and saw what appeared a party of horsemen coming from the direction of Monza. They were upon the brow of a hill, and as they came down the slope he saw that they were six in number, and that they were clad in glistening armor.

"Who can this be, in such knightly array, I wonder," he said to himself, as he watched the party descend the hill. "They are not robbers, for those gentry never appear in bright armor. They are rather those who come armed against the robbers."

In a little while the party had descended the hill, and were lost to view behind intervening trees, and as the youth was upon the point of sitting down again upon the grass, he saw another party of horsemen issuing from a wood to the left. They were twelve in number, and were clad in black armor.

"Now, by my soul," cried the observer, "we are to have a clash. This smells of conflict. These black rascals are of the robber band, and yonder bright armed travellers are marked."

By and by the first party came into sight again, and as they approached, the black knights drew back into the wood. The watcher could see both parties, and he knew that they must soon come together. The travelers were now so near that he could distinguish their bearing, and he knew them to be gentlemen. Four of them were stout knights, one seemed to be a servant, while the sixth was without armor, and apparently but a mere boy. They rode on at an easy canter, laughing and chatting, thinking, probably, that all danger had been left behind them. But they were soon to be unde-



ceived. As they emerged from behind a grove of olives, and entered upon the open plain, the robber knights came sweeping from their cover, and, with a wild battle-cry, dashed forward to the onset.

"God and Saint Stephen defend us!" cried the leader of the traveling party, and as he spoke he and his armed companions brought their lances to a rest, with their youthful companion behind them.

"This will never do," said the watcher. "Those gentlemen will be quickly swept down if they do not have help. It must not be said that a Vendorme refused his help to a suffering fellow. Come, now, my faithful blade—live or die, I'll have a hand in this!"

By a short cut he reached the place of meeting just as the onset took place.

"What ho!" he shouted, at the top of his voice; "are ye not rather near to the city of Milan for such dastard work? Give way. Twelve against six is cowardly!"

"Ho, ho," returned the robber chieftain, "here we have the duke's outcast! If you would save your head, Master Vendorme, get thee gone quickly."

"Not if thou meanest harm to these honest travelers."

"What meanest thou?"

"I mean to fight, if ye do not leave these gentlemen to pursue their way in peace."

Upon this the robber-chieftain laughed outright, and in a moment more he poked his lance derisively at the intruder. But he did not advance his lance a second time, for with one sweep of his sword the



adventurer cleft it in twain, and on the next instant the chief lay dead upon the ground. As soon as the robbers saw that their leader was dead, three of them turned upon Vendorme, as though they would make quick work with their vengeance.

"How now, outcast," one of them cried. "We would have given you a station of power with us, and now you turn against us. But your doom is sealed. Take that!"

The robber's lance was turned from the youth's body as though it had struck a surface of solid rock, and before he could recover himself he was thrown from his saddle, and his neck pierced through and through.

Vendorme now sprang to where the fight was gathering thick and hot around the travelers; and, sounding the war-cry of God and Saint Ambrose, he plunged headlong into the fray. He fought like one who had no life to lose, and where his sword fell blood was sure to follow. His bright blade seemed to have a charmed power, for beneath its strokes the stoutest armor yielded, and nothing could stay the fury of its passage.

"The outcast has a charmed body," cried one of the robbers, as he drew back from the fray, with his lance shivered, and his sword broken. "Thrice have I laid the edge of my sharp sword upon his ragged doublet, and the effect was as though I had struck thin air."

"By Saint Michael!" chimed another of the robbers, "I'll try what virtue there is in my good



sword. What ho, thou meddling villain, go wet the grass with thy blood!"

The sword descended upon Vendorme's bosom, but without effect.

"You chop at a charmed body, dog!" said the youth, and in a few minutes more he had laid the robber dead at his feet.

By this time the black villains began to waver, and when two more of their number had fallen they drew back and retreated towards the wood. There were but five of them on the retreat, for seven of their party lay dead upon the earth. Of the true knights not one had been slain, for they had fought stoutly, and had proved that they were used to war.

"Now, gentlemen," said our hero, as he wiped his sword upon his doublet, and returned it to its scabbard, "you can pursue your way in peace. I do not think the rascals will trouble you again."

"Nay, nay," cried the boy, who had been sitting out of harm's way, but yet with his sword drawn, as though ready to defend himself should the need come. "Nay, nay, my friend; we go not on until we know to whom we are indebted for this wonderful preservation. This, fair sir, is Gasper Vogel. This next is Frederic Von Brunt. And this is Ludwig Eberhard. And this, John de la Partilla,—all true and noble gentlemen, and knights of Saxony. And I, sir, am a mere boy, as you see, and am called *Theodore of Hartburg*. My father was a worthy knight, and a successful general; and out of the love they bore for him these kind friends give me their companionship and protection. This other



individual," continued the youthful speaker, pointing to the only man of the party who had not been noticed, "is a precious rascal, as you can see by his very looks. His name is Gaspard, and he calls himself my servant. Still he is a faithful fellow, and I think I love him. There, sir,—I have been frank with you, as I have reason to be; and now may we not know to whom we are indebted?"

The speaker was a fair-haired youth, not over sixteen years of age; rather slight of frame; and with a face of intellectual beauty. His eye was keen and bright, and its changing light possessed a marvellous power; for Vendorme bowed beneath its influence, and at once took the boy to his soul of confidence. The four gentlemen who had been presented to him as knights of Saxony, were stout, athletic men, who showed by their very bearing that they were at home in battle. And Master Gaspard, though but a servant, was not a foeman to be despised. He was short of stature, but broad and heavy of frame, with a frank, manly face, full of honest humor.

"Fair sir," spoke our hero, addressing the youth, "I perceive that you have authority, and I would refuse you nothing; but I am a poor outcast, as you must already have heard, and further than that it would not interest you to know."

"I claim no authority," said Theodore of Hartburg; "but I tell you plainly that through certain influential friends I have considerable power; and if you are in need, I may help you. Upon my soul, good sir, we owe our lives to you, and it would be



poor recompense if I, who am wealthy, should leave you with only empty thanks. Come—you are poor. Ah—don't blush. It is no dishonor to be poor."

"Aye, fair sir," cried Vendorme, after a little hesitation, "I am poor—so poor that I have not even one denier that I can call my own."

"But how came it? Do you not belong hereabouts?"

"Yes, sir. Milan is my native place."

"Do you return to the city to-night?" Vendorme shook his head.

"Good, kind sir," said he who had been called Eberhard, and who was of commanding presence, "we would help you if you need help, for we would pay the debt we owe you. We have need of rest; and, while our horses crop the grass awhile, we will sit here and hear your story."

"Good," cried Theodore. "I like that. Come—let us sit."

Our hero could not refuse the request which was thus earnestly pressed upon him. Who his companions were he knew not; but he felt sure that they were honest men; and he furthermore believed that they were men of wealth and power. It was towards the boyish Theodore that he turned with the most sympathy, and to him he told his story.

"I shall not make many words, fair sir, in my account of myself, for the subject is hardly worthy of it. Know, then, that my name is Orlando Vendorme. My father was Roderic Vendorme, and he was accounted the best armorer of Milan. He



made this sword of mine, which has never yet battered its edge ; and he made the shirt of mail which I wear beneath my doublet, and which neither spear nor blade can penetrate."

"Aha," interrupted Theodore, "now I see where the charm was that protected you against the blows of the robbers."

"Yes, my lord." Vendorme applied this title to the boy, for as the latter had thrown open his doublet he exposed to view the insignia of a count glittering upon his breast.

Theodore of Hartburg smiled, and Orlando proceeded.

"Not many years ago my father died, and left me not only master of his property, but also master of his trade ; and for some months I worked at my calling contented and happy. One day I received an order from Manfred, Duke of Milan, to wait upon him at his palace. I went, and he wanted me to make him a shirt of mail that could resist the stroke of the keenest sword, and I readily undertook the task. One evening, while I was waiting in the duke's closet a lady came in ; and as she, too, wished to see his highness, she sat down near me. I had the garment of mail in my hand, almost completed, and when she saw it, and knew what it was, she had a curiosity to know how it was made. She drew nearer to me, and I explained to her, as best I could, the mysteries of the intricate network. She seemed deeply interested in my story, and when I had concluded, she declared that she would have a garment of mail made for herself. She said she might at some time



need it. Shortly afterwards she heard the duke coming, and quickly left the room ; and when I described her to some of the attendants, and asked who she was, they told me she was the Princess Rosabel. She was a daughter of John, Count of Bergamo, who had died some years before, leaving his child in charge of Manfred.

“After making this discovery I imagined that I should see the princess no more ; but in this I was mistaken. Not many days after that, while I was at work in my shop, she came to see me. She had but a single attendant, whom she left at the door of the hall ; and when she had thrown off her hood I was so dazzled by her beauty that I must have been almost insolent in my gaze. She was as fair as the evening star, and as lovely in the mild sweetness of her look as the fabled houri of the Moslem.

“I need not tell you all that passed. She remained with me an hour, keeping me busy all the time exhibiting different styles and qualities of arms and armor. On the following day she came again ; and this time she made a revelation that startled me as though a lightning-bolt had burst before my eyes. She told me she had been seeking for a friend ; but that among all the throng at her guardian’s palace there was not one whom she dared to trust. She had seen me when I first called upon the duke, and she had sent her servants to inquire concerning my character. She said she had learned that I was honorable and upright, and me she had determined to trust. Aye—more than that : she threw herself upon my protection. It had been decreed that she



should marry with the Prince Ludovico, the son of Duke Manfred, and the duke had sworn that the marriage should soon take place. She loathed the prince—she hated and despised him, for he was ugly and churlish; and, moreover, he was known to be an unprincipled debauchee. Her refusal to take him for a husband, availed her nothing, for Manfred was her lord and guardian, and his will was law. She would rather die than sacrifice herself to the embrace of the foul wretch; and as a last resort she had sought me. She sought me because she believed that I was honorable and that I would not take advantage of her unfortunate situation.

“As soon as I could control my speech, I sank upon my knees, and bade the princess to command me. She raised me to my feet, and told me she would trust me. She asked me to give her a small dagger, which she could carry in her bosom, and when I had done so she went away. Two days afterwards she came again; and, as before, she left her attendant in the hall.

“And here, gentlemen, I may as well tell you as at any time—I had not only fallen passionately in love with the beautiful princess, but she had conceived a like emotion for me. I saw it in the dewy light of her melting eye, and in the tremulous melody of her voice. Driven to desperation at the prospect of being forced to wed with the wicked Ludovico she had sought the first help that came in her way. So our meeting was accidental, and our love was the result of circumstances over which we had no control. When Rosabel had confessed that she loved



me, I was stricken with a new fear. How could we ever be united? She said she would flee with me to some land where Manfred's power could not reach us. I hinted that she was sacrificing too much for me. 'No,' she cried. 'No, no, dear Orlando, it is you who are sacrificing. I have nothing to lose, but everything to gain; while you leave your home where prospects are bright before you.'

"In this way she made me feel that circumstances had brought her down to my level, and the arrangements were partially made for our flight. But we were doomed to a bitter disappointment. The servant who had accompanied Rosabel to my house proved treacherous. She had overheard our plans, and in hope of some great gain, she revealed them to the duke. Manfred was savage beyond all reason. He satisfied himself that the story of the servant was true, and then he proceeded in his work of revenge. He cast the princess into a narrow chamber, beneath lock and key, and to me he did the worst that he could do. He confiscated my property, and cast me out from the city; and his edict was, that if I was found within the gates of Milan again, I should suffer instant death. I came forth from my native city an outcast and a wanderer, with my father's sword about my loins, and a single sequin in my pocket. That was two months ago. I should have left Lombardy long ago, but I cannot tear myself away. Something whispers to me that I may yet see Rosabel again. I have heard that she is sick, and that on account of her sickness her union with Ludovico has been postponed.



"Such, gentlemen, is my story. If you think I have been foolish, I beg you will spare me your criticisms. That I have been very unfortunate no one can dispute."

Theodore of Hartburg was much moved by the outcast's story; for he was young, and the tale of love interested him. After meditating a while, he said to our hero:

"Go and catch our horses; and when you return I may have something to say unto thee."

Vendorme did as he was directed, and while he was gone the Saxons held close converse together.

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE SILVER CROSS.

When Orlando returned with the horses, Theodore of Hartburg was ready to receive him.

"I have been talking with my companions," said the boy-count, "and we find that we must do something for you. But you will understand this one thing to begin with: We do nothing in charity—we but pay you what is your due. So that point is settled. Your story has more than interested us—it has warmed us in your favor; and we are inclined to help you as we can. Is there not a tournament of some kind on the way of preparation in Milan?"

"Yes," replied our hero. "There is one to come off in two weeks, or thereabouts."



“Were ever you in armor?”

“Very often,” said Orlando, with a smile. “For two years I taught the use of the lance, axe and sword; and some of the best swordsmen in Milan have been my pupils.”

“You must have been very young for a teacher of such exercise,” remarked de la Partilla.

“So I was,” returned our hero; “but my father was accounted the most excellent teacher in all Lombardy; and as I was strong of my age, with the advantages of early and constant education, I became an expert very soon after I advanced from boyhood.”

“Good!” exclaimed Theodore, with real boyish delight. “If that is the case we can help you most surely. We have seen enough of your prowess to know that you would be next to invincible if you were armed in true knightly style. Do you not think you could bear off the duke’s prize at the tournament?”

“I should like to try,” said Orlando, modestly. “But,” he quickly added, in a mournful tone, “that privilege is forever denied me. I am not a knight, and never can be.”

“There is no knowing what may happen in the time to come,” suggested Ludwig Eberhard.

“But,” continued Vendorme, “even were I, by some golden opportunity, to win knightly spurs, I am debarred from entering Milan.”

“How so?”

“The duke’s edict.”

“You forget,” said de la Partilla. “Within the



confines of Christendom no governor can refuse passage to a true and sworn knight. The golden spur would be your passport back to Milan had you been twenty times banished; and he must first reverse your shield for some good and sufficient cause who would expel you from his dominions. However, I but take up time. The evening is approaching, and we must be on our way."

"I wish to make a bargain with you," said Theodore. "If you ever get back to Milan, will you make me a shirt of mail like that which you now wear?"

"I will, most certainly," replied Orlando.

"Then," resumed the boy, "this is a matter of business, and I shall pay you a part of the purchase money in advance. Here is a purse containing one hundred sequins."

"But," said our hero, "I may never make it."

"Never mind. That is my affair. Take the money, and when the armor is ready I will call for it. And now I have one thing further to say unto you. Where you ever in Modena?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have heard of the Count Alfonso?"

"Yes, sir."

"Here is a note which I have written to him. It is not sealed, for it is in a cypher which I think you cannot read. Alfonso is a friend of mine—he was a near and dear friend of my father—and he must have this within four days. Will you carry it to him?"

"The distance," said Orlando, musingly, "is not



over forty leagues. I can take one of these horses which the robbers have left, and reach Modena with time to spare."

"And you will go?"

"Yes."

"Then take the note, and deliver it into Alfonso's own hands, and whatever answer he gives you, you will bring to Milan. If you are faithful in this I do not think you will ever regret the hour that brought you into contact with Theodore of Hartburg."

Thus speaking, the boy vaulted to his saddle, and when his companions had followed his example, they all rode away towards the distant city.

Orlando Vendorme watched the party until they had disappeared beyond an olive grove, and then he looked upon the bit of parchment which he held in his hand. The writing was in characters entirely unknown to him, and had been hastily done with a sharp leaden point. The signature was a quaint monogram, looking very much like a wolf bearing a circle upon its back.

"Here is an adventure," the outcast cried, as he thrust the scroll into his bosom. "Upon my soul, I cannot see through it; but I'll follow it out. Let it win or fail, it cannot leave me worse off than it finds me. So here goes for Modena."

Without any difficulty he secured one of the best of the stray horses, and was soon on his way. For an hour or two he urged the beast at a pretty smart gallop, for he had no desire to be overhauled by the discomfited robbers. Before dark he reached the little town of St. Donato, where he stopped for the



night. When he went to his chamber, he drew forth the parchment, and examined it by the light of the candle. His curiosity to know what was written in the body of the note was not great ; but he did feel a great curiosity to know who had written it. Who was Theodore of Hartburg? It was a question more easily asked than answered, and after a while our hero put up the quaint monogram, and went to bed. On the following morning he was early astir, and before another night he had crossed the Po and stopped at Piacenza, where he purchased a suit of clothes a little more becoming to an individual who was about to visit a prince. On the next day he made an early ride to Parma ; and by the middle of the following afternoon he was in Modena. He sought a respectable inn, where he passed the remainder of the day, and on the next morning, at an hour when he learned that the count gave audience, he sought the palace ; and, in his turn, he was admitted to the prince's presence.

Alfonso of Modena was a large, handsome man, fifty years of age, and was accounted one of the wisest rulers in Italy. He received our hero kindly, and asked what his business was.

"I have a letter for you, my lord," replied Orlando, advancing and extending the parchment.

The count took it, and when he had cast his eyes upon the monogram he gazed up with a curious look upon his visitor.

"Where did you get this?"

"Near to Milan, my lord, I met a party of travelers, who represented themselves as knights of



Saxony. They were set upon by a band of robbers twice their number, and I helped them to overcome the foe. One of them was a youth—hardly passed beyond his boyhood—and he gave me this missive for your highness.”

“Do you know who he was?”

“Only that he called himself Theodore of Hartburg.”

The count returned to the parchment, and when he had read its contents, he looked again upon our hero. This time there was a smile upon his face, and his expression was friendly.

“Art thou Orlando Vendorme?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“And do you know why you have been sent hither?”

“No.”

“Do you imagine it was for good, or ill?”

“I cannot tell, my lord ; but I should judge that a youth of such honest appearance would not, in return for the service I did him, send me on a mission of evil.”

“You are right. You have been sent here for something of benefit. But tell me, whither was Theodore traveling?”

“I do not know whether he went beyond Milan or not ; but I judged, from what he said, that he would be in Milan in the course of a few weeks.”

“Do you know who were with him?”

“Yes, my lord. There were Gasper Vogel ; Frederic Von Brunt ; Ludwig Eberhard ; and John de la Partilla, all knights of Saxony—”



"And all true gentlemen," cried the count.

"And," added Orlando, "there was a fellow called Gaspard, who seemed to be a servant to Theodore."

"Aye—I know the fellow well."

"Perhaps, my lord, you can tell me who this Theodore is."

"He is a friend of mine, sir ; and one to whom I feel bound to grant any favor he may ask. I am deeply indebted to him through his father. But, let your curiosity touching the young lord of Hartburg pass for now, and listen to the word he has sent to me. I will show you what return he makes to you for the service you have rendered him."

Alfonso turned to his page.

"Go find the herald," he said, "and bid him attend me here with four of my trusty knights."

After the page had gone, Alfonso asked our hero some questions touching himself, and finally learned that he had been banished from Milan by the Duke Manfred.

"I knew your father well," said the count ; "and I am indebted to you through him. He gave me my first lessons in the use of arms ; and he made for me the armor which I wear when I would be safe from the strokes of lance and sword. So, you see, I obey the request of Theodore with some pleasure to myself. Ah—here comes my herald."

The individual thus alluded to—a middle aged man, bearing a golden staff—entered the audience-chamber, followed by four gentlemen who wore jewelled crosses upon their breasts.

"Sir Herald, and you, noble gentlemen of my



household—I have called you to assist me in a work I have in hand.” The count spoke thus to the newcomers, and then he turned and gave some farther directions to his page, who again left the apartment. After this he arose and came down from his high chair.

“Orlando Vendorme,” he said, “before these gentlemen, Knights of the Silver Cross—I command you to kneel.”

In a maze of wonder and almost weak from the force of the startling suspicion that burst upon him, the outcast of Milan sank upon his knees, with his head bowed upon his folded hands.

“Orlando Vendorme,” continued the count, in a solemn tone, “I am about to make you a Knight of the Silver Cross; but before that distinguished honor can be conferred upon you it becomes necessary that you should bind yourself by a solemn oath. This oath is one which no true Christian need fear to take. With this assurance from me have you any objections to taking the oath?”

In a low, tremulous whisper, Orlando replied that he had not.

Alfonso then pronounced the oath in short, measured sentences, and Orlando was required to repeat it after him, the four knights, who had drawn around the kneeling candidate, also joining in the repetition. The vows thus taken were not hard ones. The neophyte bound himself to maintain the honor of all Christian establishments; to protect the widow and the orphan; to respect the character of woman under all circumstances; to defend virtue



even with his life ; never to draw his sword in a dishonorable cause ; and never to sheath it through fear. These and some other vows he took upon himself, binding himself to their observance under penalty of losing his spurs and cross, and also his life, should he violate or transgress them.

Then the four knights clapped their hands and stamped their feet, and the count drew his sword and laid its blade upon the youth's shoulders, pronouncing, as he did so, these words :

" Sir Orlando, I bid you rise ; and I greet thee as a Brother of our Sacred Tie. Thou art a Knight of the Silver Cross from this time forth, till some deed of thine own shall forfeit thee thy life. Let me commend thee to God for wisdom ; to Christ for hope ; and to your oath for cause to walk and act as becometh a true knight !"

As Orlando arose, the count took him by the hand, and introduced him to the four knights who had assisted in the service ; and the herald was then directed to make proclamation of what had been done, and also to see that it was put upon record.

One of the knights Orlando had seen before—Sir Marco Torquedo—and the others seemed equally pleased to greet him.

" Sir Orlando," said Alfonso, " you have reached a station of rare honor. Upon the battle-field, or in the tournament, you may vie with kings and emperors."

" I know—I know," replied our hero, still trembling with excitement. " I know that I have been made a knight ; but I can hardly realize it. It seems too much to believe."



“Nevertheless it is true,” said the count. “And here comes my page with your badge. This cross I place upon your breast, and I assure you that no mark more honorable can ever be put upon you. Marco Torquedo shall put on your spurs; and while you see him upon his knees thus investing you, you will not fail to be reminded that no service can be degrading which we may be called upon to render to a true and worthy brother of our order.”

A silver cross, set with brilliants, was pinned upon Orlando's left breast; and the golden spurs were placed upon his heels; and while he wiped the tears of joyous emotion from his eyes, Alfonso again spoke:

“Thus, my brother, have I obeyed the command of Theodore of Hartburg. Other business now demands my attention. If you will accompany these worthy gentlemen they will present you with a suit of armor befitting your station.”

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### CHAPTER III.

#### THE TOURNAMENT.

Manfred, Duke of Milan, was in his closet, pacing to and fro with his hands behind him. He was a square-built, short-necked man, of middle age, with a lowering brow and a deeply sunken eye. His face bore marks of intellect, but the powers of his mind



were subservient to the passions of his grosser nature. He was of a powerful frame, and had been accounted one of the most efficient knights in Lombardy.

Directly the door of the closet opened, and a female entered. She was young—not yet twenty—and one of the fairest creatures upon which the eye of man ever rested. She was dressed in a plain garb of gray silk, and her motions were in keeping therewith. She moved slowly and mournfully, and upon her sweet face was seated a cast of deepest melancholy. This was Rosabel of Bergamo, an orphan, and a ward of Manfred's.

"How now, Rosabel?" the duke demanded, stopping in his walk as soon as the maiden entered. "Why do you make your appearance in such a garb? Do you mean to insult me?"

"Indeed not, my lord," replied Rosabel, in solemn accents. "Such a thing is far from my thoughts. You sent for me, and I have come as your messenger found me."

"Well, well, I did not mean to accuse you, so put on a little pleasanter look if you can. To-morrow you are to preside at the tournament, and I shall expect you then to appear in a manner becoming to your station. Noble knights will be present from all parts of Lombardy, and I hear that some Saxon knights are in the city. I trust, my lady, that you will so demean yourself on the morrow as to wipe out the stain that rests upon you."

"Stain, sir?" repeated Rosabel, a quick flush passing over her face.



"Yes, I mean it. Your strange and unaccountable conduct a few weeks ago cast a stain upon your name. I trust you wish not to dispute it."

"I shall not dispute you, my lord, for you have a right to your opinion, but you will allow me to say that I feel no shame in the memory of the event."

"Beware, Rosabel! You are treading upon dangerous ground. I do not like to hear you speak such words. You will please me if you are more careful. But we had better drop that subject now. You will be ready for duty to-morrow?"

"Yes, sir."

"The victor must be crowned by the Princess Rosabel, and I shall look to see you perform your task with queenly grace. You will be ready by the middle of the forenoon."

Rosabel promised that she would do the best she could, and she was then suffered to retire.

Shortly afterwards the door opened again, and this time a man entered—a young man, of some three or four-and-twenty. There was no need of questioning his paternity. In all but the mark of years he was the exact counterpart of the duke. He had the same broad, heavy frame, the same bull-like neck, the same lowering brow, and the same sensual mouth and eye. He was Ludovico, Manfred's son and only child. If physical strength and mere brute force could make a man, then the prince might lay some claims to manhood, for he possessed coarse muscle enough, and was, moreover, a noted bravo.

"Now, Lodovico, how goes the play? Have you made a passage to-day?"



"Aye—that have I," returned the prince, rubbing his hands with evident satisfaction.

"Ah—and I can see that you have come off the victor."

"Surely I have."

"But who were the contestants against thee?"

"There were three of them."

"Not all together?"

"No, but Hugh de Castro was the third one."

"What! And have you met and overcome my captain?"

"Verily have I."

"Then by Saint Ambrose, you need not fear, for I have held Hugh de Castro to be the best lance in Lombardy, and I know that he is accounted the stoutest knight. But was the joust a fair one? Did you meet him openly?"

"Aye—I met him upon an even footing, lance to lance and sword to sword—two separate bouts—and I overcame him in both. He acknowledged the defeat."

"Then, my son, to-morrow's day is yours. If you have worsted Hugh de Castro, you may safely challenge any knight who may make his appearance at our tournament. I shall expect great deeds on the morrow. We must make it a brilliant time. Something must be done to entertain the people, for they are growing restive. I must stop their grumbling."

"At what do they grumble?"

"O, they find matter in their own fancies for complaint. They think that the interests of the city are



not properly looked after, and that the marts of trade are not sufficiently protected."

"In short," added Ludovico, with a dark scowl, "they say that Manfred oppresses them."

"Yes, my son," replied the duke, biting his lips.

"I have heard the complaints," continued the prince, "and some of the rascals are open in their noisy clamor. They say you tax them too much ; and that in return you do not afford them the protection to which they are entitled. I have heard these things until my ears have heard enough ; and the sooner we put a stop to it the better."

"Ah, my son, that is not so easily done."

"Give the power into my hands, and I'll soon stop it. I'll hang every man that dares to complain. Serve a few of the snarling dogs thus, and the rest would soon keep quiet."

"I would like to do it, Ludovico—but 'twould not be safe now. We'll give the rascals some entertainment, and thus encourage the hucksters ; and, my son, if you bear away the prize to-morrow, it will help wonderfully to bring the masses to our feet ; for these villains have some pride in the success of their own princes, and if you bear down all foreign champions, you will command the praises of these discontented ones."

"Sir, if that will help you with our subjects, be sure you shall be helped," cried Ludovico, with a self-assured clap of his hands. "I am resolved to succeed. My arm is strong, and my heart is firm ; and a stronger knight than any in Milan must come if any opposition is to bear me down."



"I am glad to hear you say so, my son ; and, what is more, I feel assured that you will succeed."

"And now," pursued the prince, speaking in a lower tone, "what of Rosabel? How much longer is she to toy and trifle with us?"

"Not much," replied the duke with energy. "She has recovered from her illness ; and when this tournament is over, we will turn our attention to the nuptials."

"By the spirits of night," exclaimed the prince, stamping his foot upon the floor, "I am not to be put off longer by the whinings of a sick girl. I know her disposition, and I know with what feelings she regards myself ; but it is all one to me. The castle of Bergamo goes with Rosabel's hand, and that castle I am bound to have."

"And that castle you shall have !" added Manfred. "As soon as the tournament is over, and the settlements made, you shall have Rosabel of Bergamo for your wife, even though she be sick in her bed. So rest assured touching that matter."

"Have you heard from the young armorer since he left Milan?"

"I heard from him once, and he was then pursuing his way to the northward, begging as he went. We will have no more trouble from him."

"I hope not," said Ludovico, musingly. "Should he ever make his appearance here again he would have many friends. He was popular with the rabble. He was the leader in all their sports, and their teacher in athletic exercises ; and I have heard that there was much indignation among them when he



was banished. However, his crime was so flagrant that they could not excuse him."

At this juncture, some of the officers who had charge of preparing for the approaching tournament made their appearance, and Ludovico withdrew.

On the following morning the city of Milan was all astir. From the ducal palace, and from the lowest hovel, came the note of preparation. There had been no grand exhibition of the kind for several years, and the people were anticipating a rare entertainment. It was known that knights were to be present from all the great cities, and the thing had been planned on a grand scale. At early dawn the peasants began to flock in ; and by the time the sun was two hours high the city was full.

The ground where the tournament was to be held was in the eastern part of the town, close by the banks of the Saveso, and spacious enough to accommodate all who might wish to attend. The enclosure for the lists was a quadrangle, some two hundred yards long, by fifty in width, and upon one of the longest sides was a raised platform, or dais, spread with a carpet, and covered by a silken canopy, with seats for quite a number of persons. Only one of these seats was peculiar ;—it was a chair of velvet and gold, near the edge of the platform, with a crown of roses upon the centre post of the back. By nine o'clock the whole vast space about the enclosure was filled with eager spectators ; and, to occupy the time until the hour for the jousting, a few prizes were offered for the athletes.

The wrestlers were gazed upon with the most inter-



est, and the prize was borne off by a stout artizan named Michael Totilla. He was a handsome fellow, not more than five-and-twenty, and in his bearing a gentleman. He hurled strong men to the ground as though they had been children; and when it came to a bout at fisticuffs he was soon without a competitor.

"Ah," said the visitor, as he walked away with the prize, "I never knew but one man who could throw me."

"Did you ever know one?" asked a bystander.

"Yes," replied Michael. "My young master was stronger than I. He could throw me as easily as I threw yonder louty butcher. Ah, my good, kind friend—I wish I knew where he was at this moment!"

"When he was banished from Milan, why didn't you follow him?"

"O, I would have done so joyfully, but he would not permit it. He said I must stay and take the shop. You remember his property was all confiscated, and I managed to get possession of the old shop where his father had worked before him. No—he would not listen to my going with him. O, I wish he were a spurred and belted knight, and in these lists to-day! There's not a buckler in Lombardy could withstand his blows. But, alas! he is not here—and he never will be again!"

Hark! The trumpets sound, and the great gate at the upper end of the enclosure is thrown open; and while the guard keep back the crowd, the duke and his train ride in, and approach the dais; and when



they had dismounted, their horses are led away. Rosabel of Bergamo occupies the golden chair, and over her shoulder is thrown a scarf of crimson silk richly wrought with silver, and bearing the device, within a wreath of silver laurel leaves—"TO THE CONQUEROR." The princess is very beautiful, and she acknowledges the adoration of the multitude by a graceful bow ; but it is plain to be seen that she is not happy. She has no heart in the grand pageant, and it is with an effort that she sustains herself under the gaze of so many eyes.

"Have the athletes contended for the prize?" asked the duke of one of the heralds who stood near him.

"Yes, my lord."

"Who won at wrestling?"

"Michael Totilla."

"And who bore off the palm at boxing?"

"The same, my lord."

"What—Michael Totilla again?"

"Yes."

"Do you mean the artizan who has taken Orlando Vendorme's shop?"

"Yes, my lord."

"I think he was a workman with Vendorme!"

"He was, my lord. He learned his trade with the elder Vendorme."

"By the mass!" muttered Manfred to himself, "this stout armorer may need looking after. His success may make him a hero ; and if he begins to prate of his outcast master, his words may have some weight with the people."



The trumpets sound again ; and now a score of knights enter the enclosure and approach the dais ; and as they pass the canopied seats, they salute the duke, and make a low obeisance to the fair Princess of Bergamo. They are a noble train, and right bravely do they bear themselves in their saddles. The Prince Ludovico takes the lead. He is known by his crest. And Hugh de Castro comes next. He is known by the captain's baton, which he has retained in his hand. But who is that knight near the end of the train—he with the silver cross upon his breast-plate? The duke is eager to find him out ; but no one can inform him. A herald is sent for, and Manfred asks who is the knight of the Silver Cross.

“I cannot tell you, my lord. I think he is from Modena; but further than that I know not.”

“Ha—as I live, here comes Alfonso of Modena himself. He shall give me knowledge of the strange knight.”

The Count of Modena had entered with the knights, some of whom were from his city, and while they rode around the list he ascended the dais, where he was warmly welcomed by the duke, and presented to Rosabel.

“A noble company,” said the count, as the cavalcade rode around a second time.

“Aye, most truly,” replied Manfred. “Some of them, I think, are from Modena?”

“Yes.”

“Do you observe that royal-looking knight of the Silver Cross—the fourth from the rear?”



"Yes."

"I am told he is from your city."

"He may be."

"Do you know his name?"

"You forget yourself, my lord duke," returned the count, with a smile. "The knight wears his vizor down, which is a sign that he would remain incognito; so, even if I knew him, I should violate one of the most sacred rules of our order were I to reveal him; for I, too, am a knight of the Silver Cross."

Manfred bit his lip with vexation; but he dared not push the matter further, for he knew too well what the laws of chivalry were.

Hark! The heralds' trumpets sound again, and ere long eight knights are separated from their companions, and remain in the centre of the list. They divide into two parties, of four each, and retire to opposite sides of the paling. In one party is the stranger knight of the silver cross; but the chief knights of the tournament are not in this joust. The word is given by the duke, and the heralds sound the blast of onset. The knights start, with their lances poised, and the shock of the encounter seems to shake the very ground. Five of the knights go down—three upon one side and two upon the other. He of the silver cross has one companion, and together they set upon the other three. Two more are unhorsed, and not a whole lance is left. The stranger knight is alone against two, and as he draws his battle-axe the others do the same. The blows fall thick and fast, and very soon he of



the glittering cross has but one opponent, and that is a stout knight of Milan.

"By the mass!" cries the duke, bringing his clenched fist down upon his knee, "that fellow wields his axe right manfully. Saint Peter, what a blow was that! Ha! see—the stout Milanese is down! By my faith, I would know whose face is hid beneath that vizor."

The duke was not the only one who had eagerly watched the fray. In a far corner, close by the paling, stood Michael Tortilla, the stout armorer, and as he saw the battle progress he seemed moved by a strange emotion.

"By Saint Paul!" he cried, as the stranger knight wielded his axe, "there is but one man living who knows those sweeps. If I am not dreaming, then my young master's spirit inhabits that knightly armor."

"What is it you say?" asked a smith, who stood near.

"Nothing—nothing," returned Michael. "Ha!—Look! Down goes the iron knight! Now I know that lofty carriage. O, God grant I be not deceived! And yet—how can it be?"

Michael Tortilla was in trouble; and with clasped hands and straining eyes he gazed eagerly after the proud victor.

Shouts, loud and long, rent the air, as the knight of the silver cross sat alone in his saddle after his fallen companions and contestants had been helped from the field. He rode around the list twice, in an



easy, graceful manner, and then stopped near the dais.

"What does the knight demand?" asked Manfred.

"He challenges now to single combat any knight who dares oppose him."

"Bid him send me his name."

"He will not do it, my lord. He says if he is vanquished, his victor may remove his vizor, when some one present may recognize him. On the other hand, should he prove the victor, he must bare his head to receive the prize."

"Audacious! Does he think we will find brave knights to engage him upon such terms! He must give his name."

"My lord duke," whispered Alfonso of Modena, "you forget the laws. While a knight keeps his saddle, or stands upon his feet, his face is his own. He of the Silver Cross is right. Have you not some champion to engage him?"

"Yes—a score of them," cried Manfred.

At this point Ludovico approached his father and whispered to him aside:

"What shall be the arrangement with this fellow?" he asked.

"First," returned the duke, "do you know who he is?"

"No—I cannot learn. I only hear that he is from Modena."

"But, my son, what think you of his prowess? Can you overcome him?"

"Aye—that I can. The iron knight was too clumsy. Give yourself no uneasiness."



"Then I shall arrange it after my own pleasure. Hugh de Castro shall engage him first, and you shall immediately afterwards fight the victor. Thus you will come fresh to the field. Do you understand?"

Ludovico, with a lurking smile, said yes.

Very soon afterwards the captain of the duke's guard rode into the list, and picked up the gauntlet which had been thrown down by the knight of the Silver Cross.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### THE VICTOR !

"Look," said the duke, speaking to one of his heralds, and pointing to where a strange party had taken position near the northeastern angle of the enclosure. There were four knights fully armed, a servant, and a fair-haired boy, and this was the first time the duke had seen them. "Go and find out who those knights are. If they would enter the lists, they shall have opportunity, and if they would only look on to see others sport, they may have room upon the dais."

The herald went upon his mission, and when he returned, he reported :

"The knights thank you very graciously, my lord, but they will not leave their saddles, as they may not remain long. It is a party of Sir Frederic



Von Brunt, of Saxony, on their way home from Rome."

"And the boy is his son, I suppose?"

"I think it very likely, my lord."

Alfonso of Modena had seen the party alluded to, and for a few moments he seemed deeply moved—so much so that he could not sit quietly in his seat. He had heard the conversation between the duke and the herald, and as soon as the latter had gone, he turned to Manfred, and remarked :

"I see Sir Frederic Von Brunt yonder. He is an old friend of mine. I think I will go and speak with him."

"Ah, then you know the party, Sir Count?"

"I know Sir Frederic, and I think I recognize one other."

"Who is the boy?"

"Really—I—don't know. Don't you know him, my lord duke?"

"How should I? I never was in Saxony. I thought it might be Von Brunt's son."

"Very likely. I believe he has a son. In fact, I know he has."

"Are you going to speak with him?"

"I had thought of it."

"Then bear to him and his party my greeting, and tell them that the hospitality of my palace is theirs."

Alfonso hastened away, and when he reached the place where the Saxon knights rested in their saddles, he bowed to Von Brunt, and then made his way straight to the boy.



"Ah, my lord of Modena," said the latter, speaking hastily, as though he would prevent the count's salutation, "did you think it worth your while to seek Theodore of Hartburg?"

"My——"

"Hush! Sir Frederic Von Brunt is leader of this party. If you have any obeisance to make, make it to him. But I am glad you have come. Not long since I sent a young man unto you for a favor—his name was Vendorme."

"He came, my lord, and he is here to-day."

"Ha—I thought so. That is he whose gauntlet Sir Hugh de Castro has just picked up."

"Yes."

"I was sure it could be no other. By our Lady, he is a valiant knight, and he honors the Silver Cross."

"Aye, my lord——"

"A little more care, Alfonso. If I am lord of Hartburg, it need not be known here. Remember. See! the knights are ready for the tilt. I will see you, Sir Count, after the sports are over."

When Sir Hugh de Castro came forth and picked up the gauntlet, another shout went up from the multitude but not such as went up on the former occasion. De Castro was known to be a powerful knight, but he was not loved by the people, and it was easy to see that the great sympathy on the present occasion was not with him. While the preliminaries were being arranged, the Count of Modena returned to the dais, and as he passed the golden chair, he thought that the Princess Rosabel



looked very pale. He stopped, and rested his hand upon her arm. He had been a warm friend of her father's, and he felt a deep interest in herself.

"Sweet lady," he said, in a low, earnest tone, "you are not well."

She gazed up into his face with a startled look, but when she saw who it was, and beheld the kindness of his expression, she was calm again.

"I am very well," she said, "but this excitement may move me to weakness. You, my lord, are of Modena. I have heard that yonder brave knight is from the same city. Perhaps you know him?"

"I do know him, lady, but I cannot break my vow. While he is in the list his secret is sacred. Did you fancy that you recognized him?"

"No, my lord—that is—I know no knight at all like him in bearing."

"Rest easy, sweet lady. If he wins the prize, you will be the first to see his face."

"Do you think he will win?"

"I don't know, but I think the chances are in his favor."

"O—I hope he will!"

The princess said this to herself, but Alfonso heard it, and as he moved to his seat he shook his head, muttering, in an undertone :

"Ah—if I mistake not, love is prying beneath the casque of the brave knight!"

Ha! See! The two knights have turned at opposite sides of the list, and the trumpets sound a loud blast. Like arrows shot from the archer's bow they leave the paling, and as they approach each other all



breaths are hushed, and every heart holds from its beating. They meet with a terrific shock—both lances are shivered to atoms, and de Castro's shield is bent, but both riders keep on, though the duke's captain finds it hard work to regain his balance in his saddle. New lances are brought, and very soon the charge is sounded again. But Hugh de Castro is not steady in his seat. He has not recovered from the shock. His left arm is weak, and the shield trembles. He dashes on, however, but not to conquest. When the meeting comes, he is thrown backward from his saddle, and lies helpless upon the ground.

Does Hugh de Castro claim further trial?

No. He could not contend if he would.

Another shout rent the air, and praises of the gallant victor were upon every lip. How grandly he bore himself, and how gracefully he swept around the enclosure after his second victory. As he approached the dais where sat the judge he cast down his gauntlet again, and in a moment more Ludovico rode in and picked it up upon the point of his lance. When the duke saw this he gave orders to the heralds to sound another onset.

"No, no," cried a loud voice from a far corner. "By the Saint of Milan, that is not fair. Give the brave knight rest!"

"It is not fair! It is not fair!" arose from every part of the vast concourse.

"My lord duke," said Alfonso of Modena, "you will not surely allow the brave champion to be



worried down thus. Let some others take the list while he has time to breathe."

"No," cried Manfred, smiting his fist upon his knee. "He has thrown down his challenge, and he must meet the result."

"But," urged the count, "this is not knightly. He will meet the result, but he should not be forced beyond human endurance."

"It shall be as I have said," exclaimed the duke, impatiently. "I am the judge, and the rule is mine. Let the trumpets sound!"

Alfonso of Modena was not the only man of note who found fault with the course of the judge. Frederic Von Brunt swore a fearful oath when he saw it, and Theodore of Hartburg quivered with indignation.

"By my knighthood," the boy uttered, "this is most foul! Will it be allowed?"

"Yes," replied Von Brunt. "I saw Alfonso laboring with the duke, but it affected nothing. See—they are preparing for the joust. Now may our blessed Lady assist the brave champion!"

"Amen!" said Theodore fervently.

The knight of the Silver Cross had taken a new lance, and he was advised to take a fresh horse, but he did not choose to do so. He had become used to the manner of his steed, and he felt confidence in the animal's power. He took his place at the end of the tilting-ground, and awaited the sound of the trumpets.

Ludovico was mounted upon a powerful stallion well trained to the joust, and as he took his place



he bore himself with proud assurance. He was a formidable leading opponent, and those who had seen him overcome Hugh de Castro looked to see the stranger knight bite the dust. It was not fair, they said, to call upon the gallant champion in such haste. It was a thing unusual. Manfred heard the murmurs arising from all hands and he determined to quiet the tumult as quickly as possible; but he did not mean to quiet it by doing a generous deed. No—he feared to give the stranger rest, lest his son should be overcome, so he gave orders for the heralds to sound the charge, which was done as soon as the prince was ready.

It was plain to be seen that the knight of the silver cross grasped the lance with more than his usual resolution, and that he was more careful in fixing his shield. And then, too, he braced himself in his saddle more firmly, with his feet fixed to best advantage in the stirrups.

At the sound of the trumpets the combatants started forward, and when the shock came the spectators looked to see horses and riders rolled in the dust; but not so. Both riders reeled in their saddles, and the lance of the knight of Modena was broken.

“By Saint Paul,” cried Michael Totilla, “there is foul play in this. The prince had the stronger lance!”

And so others believed; but there was little time for speech. He of the silver cross rode to the marshal’s stand and demanded a new lance. One was handed to him, and when he had balanced it a



moment in his hand, he raised it above his head and snapped it in twain.

"Give me a weapon fit for work," he cried, as he cast the fragments at the marshal's feet.

"Now by the bones of my fathers," exclaimed Theodore of Hartburg, whose station was near the marshal's stand, "if this brave knight be worsted by means so foul, there shall be a reckoning most severe. I can produce a knight that shall sweep yonder stout prince from his saddle as I would brush away a fly."

"Easy, my lord," whispered Von Brunt. "The knight is not to be put off with a worthless weapon. See how he tries them."

It was even so. The stranger tried three lances before he accepted one; and when he was finally satisfied he returned to his place. The duke trembled with passion when he saw the worthless lances cast down, but he dared not say anything in opposition. He could only grind his teeth, and, when all was ready, spit out the order to the heralds with a show of vengeance.

Again the combatants started, and this time the knight of the silver cross performed a feat which, had it failed, must have brought defeat to himself. When within a few yards of his antagonist he gave his lance a sweep, bringing it down upon the edge of the opposing shield with such force as to break the guard, and on the next instant the prince was caught beneath the chin, and lifted clean from his saddle.

As the knight of Modena went safely on to the



paling, without so much as quaking in his seat, leaving Ludovico rolling in the dust, a shout went up from the multitude that fairly rent the air.

"By my dukedom," cried Manfred, smiting his fist upon his thigh, "I never saw but one man who could make that stroke with the lance at full tilt, and he was not a knight."

"Of whom do you speak?" asked Alfonso of Modena.

"Of an old armorer named Roderic Vendorme," replied the duke. "But how is it with my son?—Ha—he starts up himself. He is not hurt."

Ludovico managed to regain his feet, and as soon as he could collect his scattered senses he started for the marshal's stand. He would not mount his horse again, but demanded a trial with the sword.

"Easy, fair sir," said Frederic Von Brunt, who chanced to sit very near to where Ludovico had stopped; "I have seen yonder knight handle the sword, and if your arm is not wondrously strong, and your eye quick as light, you would do better to surrender where you are."

"Peace!" cried the prince, taking his sword and pressing the point upon the ground. "I yield not to an unknown braggart. 'Twas an accident unhorsed me. We shall see if my arm hath not some power." And thus speaking he strode forward into the arena, and awaited the coming of his antagonist.

The knight of Modena had no choice but to descend from his saddle and accept this offer. He could not force the prince to mount again, nor could he claim the victory while his opponent held arms



against him ; so he gave his horse up to the groom, and drew his sword from its scabbard.

“Come on !” cried Ludovico, brandishing his weapon with furious sweeps. “Now for the tug. Look to yourself !”

The strange knight had wit enough not to waste his strength of lung in speech ; but, with his lips closed, and his buckler held easily over his left breast, he received the first blow of his antagonist, and turned it over his shoulder. Another blow, and another,—and yet he of the silver cross did not strike. He stood so calm and so confident, and turned off the blows with such apparent ease, that Ludovico became infuriate.

“Strike ! Strike !” the prince yelled. “Are you fearful ?”

Not a word from the lips of the stranger ; but presently his sword performed a circle in the air, and came down upon the prince’s buckler with a clang that made the people start. Again, as quick as thought, flashed the sword aloft, sweeping in strange courses, and descending like lightning upon the shoulder of the Milanese. Again and again fell the trenchant blade, with swift, unerring aim, and ere long Ludovico fell backward upon the ground, with his gorget hewn away, and in a moment more the victor’s sword was at his bare throat.

“Speak !” said the knight of Modena.

“I yield !” came in a gasping tone from the lips of the prince.

Loud and long were the shouts that went up from the multitude ; and Manfred was not more chagrined



by his son's defeat than he was by this clamorous evidence that the mass of the people were glad that the defeat had thus turned. But he was not quite yet prepared to deal justly. He saw that the prince had yielded up his sword, so there could be no excuse for allowing him again to contend.

"What ho!" he cried, starting forward to the edge of the dais, and raising his truncheon aloft, "who now will contend with this unknown knight?"

"But, my lord," spoke the marshal—"you will not have him called again to contend?"

"He must meet all comers!" pronounced the duke. "What ho, Sir Knight of the Silver Cross,—cast down thy gauntlet again."

The knight approached the ducal stand, and with a low bow, spoke as follows :

"My lord, I have done all that the laws of knight-hood require, and more. I have met the prince at a step beyond my line of duty. And now, sir, I am satisfied to abide by your decision. If I have not won the prize, I will retire from the list."

The duke cast his eyes about him, and he saw very plainly that it would not do to push his plan further; so, with a power that he could exercise when occasion called, he put on a smile, and spoke as graciously as though he were pleased with what he said :

"Sir Knight of the Silver Cross, since no one appears to challenge thee, I must award to thee the prize due to thy valor. Kneel at the feet of the princess, and let the herald make proclamation that



the victor is to be clothed with the conqueror's scarf."

The trumpets were sounded, and the proclamation was made; and while another shout of satisfaction went up from the multitude, the stranger knight knelt, and loosened the straps of his helmet.

Rosabel of Bergamo arose and stepped forward, with the scarf in her hands. She was deathly pale, and it was with difficulty that she maintained herself. As the helmet fell from the victor's head, she let the scarf fall over his neck, but she could not make the speech which had been set for her. She saw the face of the conquering hero—she caught the light of the dark eye as it beamed hopefully upon her—and then she sank back into her chair, and buried her face in her hands; and she would surely have fallen from her seat had not her attendants supported her.

"Whom have we here?" cried the duke, springing forward. "It is ORLANDO VENDORME! It is the OUTCAST!"

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## CHAPTER V.

### THE OLD HOME.

Like a stream of light flashed the intelligence through the crowd that the gallant victor was ORLANDO VENDORME. For a few moments the word was carried with a murmuring sound, and people



knew not what to do, or what to think ; but by and by, when the thing was certain—when the conqueror arose, and the handsome features of the outcast were plainly seen—then another shout rent the air. But one man, who had lent his lungs to swell the shout on the previous occasions, was silent now. Michael Totilla recognized his young master, and while others shouted, he bowed his head in thought. He had suspected this before, but he had not realized its full force until the truth was thus demonstrated to his vision.

“I don’t know how it is,” he muttered to himself, taking one more look at the victor, as though he would assure himself that there could be no mistake, “but thus it is. That is Orlando ; and he has won the prize. If he has made his way in here without being a true knight, his head is in danger ; and if, by some wonderful chance, he hath honorably won the knightly spurs, his head is in danger all the same. I must keep my ears and eyes open now.”

And thus speaking, the stout artizan worked his way nearer to the dais.

As soon as the duke could recover himself, and had seen Rosabel assisted from the scene, he started back a pace, and called for his marshal.

“What ho ! Bring hither your officers ! This is a foul imposter ! The wretch has made his way hither in disguise, and his punishment hath been spoken. Make haste!”

At this point the Count of Modena stepped down from his seat, and Frederic Von Brunt and Ludwig



Eberhard moved near to the stand. Meanwhile, Vendorme had risen to his feet, and had put on his helmet, with the vizor thrown up.

"My lord," spoke Alfonso, "he is a true knight. He is no imposter."

"How now?" demanded Manfred, hotly. "How can that be? Who vouches for his knighthood?"

"I do," replied the count.

"Then you have been deceived, and the villain hath imposed upon you; so he is an imposter, as I said. Where are the officers? Bring an axe and strike off his spurs!"

By this time a score of knights had gathered around the spot, and when they heard that the Count of Modena vouched for the knighthood of the accused, their sympathies all went with him. He had overcome Hugh de Castro and Prince Ludovico, whom they disliked; and now, if he was honest, they meant to stand by him. The prince, though lame and sore, had made his way to the dais, and was clamorous in his demand for instant vengeance upon the youthful adventurer.

"His sentence is death," Ludovico exclaimed. "The sentence was passed upon him when he was banished. It was then decreed, should he ever again be found within the limits of the city, that his head should be the forfeit."

"Aye," responded Manfred. "My son speaks truly; and so it shall be. Hugh de Castro, bring hither some of your guard, and take the culprit hence."

Vendorme did not move nor speak, for he saw



that Alfonso of Modena had taken up his cause ; and he furthermore saw that the knights of Saxony regarded him with friendly looks.

"My lord," said Alfonso, "I must speak again ; and I give you my knightly word that Orlando Vendorme hath won his spurs right honorably ; and that he wears the silver cross most righteously."

"How do you know ?" demanded the duke.

"Because," replied Alfonso, "I myself conferred the order upon him."

"But you had no right."

"You are mistaken. Here is my right honorable chamberlain, Marco Torquedo, who assisted me in the ceremony of initiation ; and there were others of our grand order present."

"How—how could you do it ?" cried Manfred. "What reason had you ? By what right could you elevate an outcast to our order of the silver cross ?"

"By the best of all rights," answered Alfonso, drawing himself proudly up. "I am the Grand Master of the order, and the candidate was sent to me with credentials which were satisfactory ; and now, sir, I vouch for his standing as a true knight."

"But," said Manfred, choking with rage, "he is still under the penalty. He was banished from Milan, and his return has subjected him to death."

"Ah, my lord duke, you forget yourself. There are laws which you and I dare not break. A true knight of the Cross hath passage to any city in Christendom, and the gates cannot be closed against him. You cast out a poor armorer—he returns with



the passport of the silver cross—and he claims passage by a right which you cannot deny.”

“I do deny it!” exclaimed the duke, now fairly beside himself with passion. “He shall not escape me thus! He is a criminal, and as such, within my own dominions, I claim him for punishment. Away with him! I will hear no more!”

“’Fore God!” cried Frederic Von Brunt, pushing his way nearer to the dais, “this shall not be. I espouse the cause of the gallant victor. For what he hath this day done let him harm him who dare!”

And as he thus spoke he drew off his iron gauntlet and cast it upon the ground.

“Aye! aye!” echoed many other knights; and in a moment more a score of gauntlets were lying at the duke’s feet.

“S’death!” gasped Ludovico, who stood leaning upon the arm of an attendant; “are we to be insulted thus?”

“It is right, sir; and the duke is wrong,” pronounced a quiet voice.

The prince turned to see who had spoken, and encountered the gaze of Theodore of Hartburg.

“How now, insolent boy!” cried Ludovico, firing with passion. “Put in thy tongue again with its meddling, and I’ll smite thee where thou sittest!”

“Be not too sure, sir prince.”

“By the gods, I know what I say; and thou had’st best beware, or thy countship will not save thee. They tell me thou art a count, and if it so be, I would advise thee to attend to thine own business.”

The boy count quivered from head to foot, and



once his hand dropped upon his sword-hilt ; but he quickly recovered himself, and, with a smile creeping over his handsome features, turned away.

Meanwhile the duke had had time for reflection. When he saw the stout knights espousing the cause of the outcast, he knew that they were in earnest ; and he furthermore knew that he had no ground for opposition. The laws of knighthood had been truly laid down by the Lord of Modena, and he knew that he was bound to their obedience by a sacred oath.

"Gentlemen," he said, swallowing his passion, and assuming a yielding expression, "the heat of my disappointment has somewhat ruffled me ; but I am not blind to our solemn obligations. Place yourselves in my position, and you may judge something of the feelings I must have experienced when I first knew that he who had overcome my son was an outcast from my city. But it is past. Forgive me if I have been intemperate. Sir knight," he added, extending his hand to Vendorme, "I greet thee as the true victor of the day. Wear thy prize, and see to it that you walk worthy of the high honor that has been conferred upon you. As a knight of the silver cross I bid thee welcome to our city. Now let the trumpets sound, and then we'll away to the banquet ; and after that the minor sports shall succeed."

There was a blast from the heralds, and another shout ; and soon afterwards the cavalcade of knights, led by Hugh de Castro, started for the ducal palace. The great banqueting hall was thrown open, and Manfred took his place at the head of the table, upon an elevated dais, and by his



side sat Orlando Vendorme. The youth would not have been there if he could have avoided it ; but, as victor of the day, by the laws of chivalry, he was obliged to sit at the commemorative feast. There were knights and gentlemen present from all sections of Lombardy ; but there were no ladies. The princess, who should have occupied the seat upon the right of the duke, was absent from indisposition, so that place was given to the Count of Modena.

But where were the knights of Saxony ? The duke looked for them in vain.

"They could not remain," said Alfonso. "They are on their way to the north, and have but little time on their hands."

"Never mind," returned the duke. "I shall not miss them. To tell the truth, I do not fancy these Saxons. They are churlish fellows, and meddlesome."

Alfonso made no reply to this.

The feast commenced, and, as might be expected, Orlando Vendorme was the chief object of remark. To him many praises were given, and in his honor the minstrel sang. But the youth was not at ease. He had been carried through the scenes of the list without much trial to his nerves, but at the duke's table he did not feel at home. He knew that he had many friends present ; and he also knew that he had some enemies. Manfred addressed him with smooth speech, but beneath this complaisant exterior there was lurking a fire of most deadly hatred. Orlando could see it and feel it ; and he knew, too, that he was the object of other deadly hatred beside. After



candles had been brought in, and the wassail ran high, he made an excuse to leave the table, and when he had gained the court he took his way towards the dwelling he had formerly occupied. He fancied that some one left the palace directly behind him ; but there were so many people moving in the streets that he could not tell whether he was followed or not. When he reached the house he sought, he stopped and knocked upon the door. The summons was answered by Michael Totilla.

"God and the holy saints be praised !" cried the honest artizan, stretching forth his hands. "O, my dear master, this is worth a year of life. Come—all is safe within. I am alone, with only my little Cinthia. You remember her. Come."

Orlando followed Michael into the house—into the room where he had spent his childhood—where he met a smiling, happy face. It was a youthful face, and upon a spry little body. Our hero knew that face very well, for it belonged to the daughter of one of his father's old workmen.

"This is my Cinthia—my wife—my companion," said the armorer with pride.

"I remember her," returned Orlando, taking her fair hand and raising it to his lips; "and I give her this salute in token of a brother's love."

"A brother in love," cried Michael; "but a father in deeds of care and counsel. Ah, my master, many is the time that Cinthia has told me that she loved you next to me. You didn't expect to find us married."

"Ah, my good Michael, I hardly expected to find



you at all; but now that I have found you, I must say that the finding of you married gives me additional joy. You must have been surprised when you saw the face that bowed before the princess Rosabel this afternoon."

"Not much, Orlando; for I had discovered you before. Those blows of your axe revealed your arm. Still I was not sure until I saw your face. It is wonderful. I cannot account for it. I can hardly realize it. Cinthia and I have been talking about it."

"And now, I suppose," said our hero, with a smile, "you would like to have me talk about it."

"Certainly," replied Michael, frankly.

Cinthia expressed her desire to hear the wonderful story by quickly bringing a stool and taking a seat close by her husband.

Orlando had nothing to conceal from these true friends, so he commenced at the beginning, and gave a full account of all his adventures, from the date of his banishment up to the present time. He told how he had suffered—how he had gone hungry—and how he had even begged for bread; and then he told of meeting with the Saxon knights, of his adventure with the robbers, and of the reward which he had received from the youthful Count of Hartburg.

"The moment I found myself a knight," he continued, "or, I should say, when I was able to realize that I was a knight, I resolved to be present at this tournament. I had learned that my knighthood rendered null the edict of the duke against me, and I meant to make my mark if I could. How it has all turned out you have seen,"



"It is wonderful!" exclaimed Cinthia, gazing up into Orlando's face with an expression curiously struggling between love and awe.

"Aye, most wonderful," echoed Michael. "But, my master, there is something curious about this young Theodore of Hartburg. He has been here since the joust was over; he was here just at sunset—he and a knight named Von Brunt—and he left the measure for a shirt of mail, which he said you would make for him."

"Yes," returned Orlando. "I promised to make him one; and he paid me in advance. I wish I could have seen him. Did he say when he should want it?"

"He asked me if I supposed you could have it done within a month; and I told him that, with my assistance, I thought you could. Then he said that at the expiration of that time he might be here again."

"There is something in that boy's character, Michael, which I cannot fathom; but he has been a friend to me, and I shall go at work at once upon the shirt of mail, that is, if I can have room in your shop."

"Hush, my master. The shop is yours."

"Not so, Michael. If you have paid your money for it, it is yours."

"And where did I get my money? Where did I learn my trade? How did I become a cunning workman at our craft?"

"Never mind, my dear friend and brother," said Orlando, deeply moved by this proof of Michael's



goodness ; “for the present we will call the shop *ours*. And now, will you help me make the armor?”

“But—do you mean to go at work—to work at the forge?”

“Certainly. Why not?”

“You are a knight.”

“That does not make labor dishonorable to me.”

“No,” said Michael ; and after a little hesitation, he added : “But there is another reason. There is danger in the way.”

“Ha—where?”

“Do you imagine that the duke will let you rest in peace?”

“Ah, my brother, you suspect him, do you?”

“Don’t you, my master?”

“Well, Michael, to tell you the truth, I do suspect that he hates me, and that he would not fail to crush me if I gave him opportunity ; and I am not sure that I should stop here in Milan at present, were it not that I have promised this work. Not for my life would I fail to keep my word with Theodore of Hartburg ; and you know that the armor he seeks cannot be made at any other forge. I do not believe that I could temper the fine steel in any other place. What think you?”

“I fear it is even so.”

“You know it is so.”

“At any rate, my master, I cannot dispute you.”

“Then I must remain beneath this roof for the month to come, and we will work together. At the end of that time the boy-count may come for his armor ; and then, perhaps, we shall learn something



more concerning him. I think our little Cinthia will cook for me, and find me in clean linen."

"And more than that, sir," replied the true-hearted woman. "I will not only cook and wash for you, but I will watch for you. I will keep my eyes open for enemies."

"Aye," added Michael, with a shake of the head, "there may be need of it. We'll have to watch, and we'll have to be careful. Of course, Orlando, you will not think of seeking further interview with—"

"With whom, Michael?"

"Never mind. It was a foolish thought. I know you will not run your own neck beneath the axe."

Orlando Vendorme knew very well what his companion would have said; and in the season of silence that followed he bowed his head, and thought of the pale, yet beautiful face that beamed upon him when he received the conqueror's scarf.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### PLOTTING.

During three days sports of various kinds were kept up in the enclosure which had been prepared for the tournament; and as a closing scene the duke gave a grand feast of meat and wine to the populace. Of course there were loud cheers for Man-



fred of Milan, and many an oath was taken in his name.

It was past midnight of the last day of the carnival, and the sounds of revelry were nearly hushed. Manfred had not yet retired. He had just come in from the streets, where he had been walking in disguise. The prince Ludovico was with him. The prince had not been in the street, however; for he had not yet recovered from the shock of his joust, and his leg was lame, and his back stiff.

"I think," said Ludovico, taking a seat by the table where wine was placed, "that you have won somewhat upon the people by this festival."

"What makes you think so?" asked the duke, stopping, and sitting at the opposite side of the table.

"What reason have I for thinking otherwise?" returned Ludovico, regarding his father with a look of surprise. "Have I not heard the people, even from here, where I have passed the evening, shouting praises to Manfred of Milan? Has not the whole city rung with your name?"

"Aye," replied the duke, with a bitter curl of the heavy lips, "my name has been upon the air; and men have praised me, and sworn by me; but what of it? Who are they that shout? I have been among them so thoroughly disguised that I seemed a stranger in Milan, and I have heard and seen; and I have learned how much such demonstrations are worth. The drunken rabble have used my name most freely, but the sober, thinking citizens I



have not seen in the revel. No, if this saturnalia hath pointed any influence, it will be against me. My choicest plans have been thwarted."

"How thwarted?" asked the prince.

"How thwarted? Don't you know? Who was it that won the prize at the tournament? Who overcame my stout captain? Who overcame my son?"

Ludovico started with the memory of his defeat, and a bitter curse escaped his lips.

"I know, I know," he said; "but there may be retribution in that quarter. Do you know what the outcast Vendorme has done with himself?"

"Aye—there's the rub! I have heard to-night that he has gone at work in his old shop."

"What!—Not at his old calling?"

"Yes. He is at work at his forge; and that rascal of a Michael Totilla is helping him."

"Then where is his knighthood? I do not believe he was ever truly knighted."

"I don't know," said the duke, with a dubious shake of the head. "There's something in connection with that affair which I cannot fathom. He must have been knighted, for Alfonso of Modena conferred the order himself, and there is the mystery. Why should the count have done it? But that is not all. Who are these knights of Saxony that made themselves so conspicuous at the tournament? They have had something to do with this."

"Never mind," cried the prince, with an oath. "Let them go as they came. What care we for the burly braggarts of the North? If Orlando Ven-



dorme hath set himself down again in our city, we must take care of him. Did you not see how the sight of his face affected our fair princess?"

"Aye—I marked it well."

"And do you not believe that even now she would flee to this outcast if she had the opportunity?"

"Yes—I am sure she would."

"Then how long shall we suffer him to remain in our city?"

The duke looked into his son's face, and a half-waking smile flitted across his dark countenance.

"Why do you ask me that question, Ludovico?"

"Because I would know if we are to be ridden upon by a dog!"

"Wait—wait, my son. Do you get over your lameness, and get ready for your marriage with Rosabel, and if Orlando Vendorme is here to trouble you after that, you may set it down that the Duke of Milan has been again thwarted. Do you understand me?"

"I think I do," replied the prince, watching the shadows of evil as they played over his father's face.

"Then get thee to bed, and nurse thyself carefully, so that Rosabel of Bergamo may have a husband as soon as may be, for the sooner you secure her the better may it be."

Ludovico arose from his chair, and moved towards the door, but before he reached it, he turned and gazed again upon his parent.

"My father," he said, in a low, earnest tone, "I wish to ask you a question, and your answer may be



as you please. I do not speak from curiosity, but from a desire to fortify myself and to help you at the same time. We have spoken of Orlando Vendorme. Do you fear him?"

"No!" cried the duke, stamping his foot upon the floor.

"Do not misunderstand me. I mean—would you fear him if you could not sweep him from your path?"

"Why do you ask that question?"

"Because I have reason for it. I have seen some things, and they have led me to think; and they have led me to ask myself questions which I cannot answer. Why has Alfonso of Modena taken such a strange interest in the outcast? What does it mean? And who is that boyish count that calls himself Lord of Hartburg? Why was he here with his train of knights? Why did he, too, take such an interest in Vendorme? These are the things that puzzle me."

"And they puzzle me as well, my son. But they do not frighten me. I will solve the problem as Alexander severed the Gordian knot. Now go to your bed, and obey the instructions of your physicians."

Ludovico left the apartment without asking any more questions, and in a little while after he was gone Sir Hugh de Castro entered.

"Good, my captain," cried the duke. "I have been waiting for you. Have you left everything quiet?"

"As quiet as I can desire, my lord," replied de



Castro. "The streets are in order, and the wine-shops are closed."

"Good. Be seated, sir, and listen to me."

Hugh de Castro had been Manfred's companion almost from boyhood, and he was just the man for a tyrant's tool, bold, daring and unscrupulous, with just ambition enough to fill the place he held, he was willing to do anything to please the man who kept him in a station of authority and power. Had he been more intelligent, he might have proved a dangerous friend for his master, but he knew his own weak points, so he did not aspire to rule.

"My captain," said the duke, after the knight had drank a cup of wine, "what think you of the youngster that overcame you at the tournament?"

De Castro bit his lip and clenched his fist.

"He is a stout rascal, my lord."

"Aye—I know that, but I would discover what your opinion is touching another matter. Have you seen him since you left the list?"

"I caught a glimpse of him through the shop window this evening, my lord, as he was at work at the bench."

"Ah—that's it, my captain. How like you the idea of the champion of our city working at the forge?"

"It is humiliating."

"Of course it is."

"But I can't see why he does it," said de Castro. "There is something mysterious about the whole affair."

"Would it hurt you, my dear Hugh, to know that



this upstart champion was—once more banished from Milan?"

"No—indeed it would not. But, my lord, how can you do it? Has he done anything—"

"Pshaw! you don't understand me. I mean—how would you like to see him banished from this earth?"

"Ah—now I comprehend. Oho—I see it now. And, my lord duke, you touch me in the right place."

"Good, my captain. I have thought of this thing and I have concluded that it must be done, and, furthermore, I have wondered who would help me in the work."

"Hold, my lord. You need wonder no more. Here is my hand. Let me but have your ducal order, and the thing is done."

"Don't misunderstand me, de Castro. I mean not to issue my edict. The work, if done at all, must be done so secretly that the story shall never be told. There must be no arrest—no noise. He must be slipped off as quietly as possible."

Hugh de Castro poured out a cup of wine, and when he had drank it, he said, as he put the cup down by way of emphasis :

"I understand you, and it shall be done ; and in one week from this time those who seek for Orlando Vendorme shall seek in vain !"

"And now," cried Manfred, rising from his seat, "I can seek my couch in some manner of comfort. A fitting reward awaits thee, my captain, when the deed is done."

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Orlando Vendorme went at work in the old shop on the very next day after the tournament. He had promised the young lord of Hartburg that the armor should be made ; and, under all the circumstances of the case, he could not hesitate. He felt that he was running some risk, but he would not allow the fear of his enemies to deter him from fulfilling his obligation. He went at his work in the forenoon, and before night he had succeeded in forming a pattern of chain to suit him. He produced some fine wire so subtile that it yielded almost like threads of gold when bent or twisted, and yet of a temper so keen that a sword could not cut it. Thus successful in the outset, he flattered himself that he should produce for Theodore of Hartburg a suit of mail utterly impenetrable to mortal weapon.

"It is the finest steel I ever saw," said Michael, after he had put the wire to the test. "That is something which I could never do."

"But you shall do it, Michael, before this armor is finished ; so that, when I again leave you to yourself, you can furnish mail equal to any ever made by Roderic Vendorme or his son. How will that please you ?"

"So well," replied Michael clapping his hands with joy, "that I shall be the happiest man alive. When I can make a network like that which you now possess, I shall be able to do that which no other armorer in Milan, save yourself, can accomplish."



"That is even so," returned Orlando. "And you shall have the first secret this very night."

Michael Totilla bent himself with careful attention to the instruction of his young master, and before the expiration of another day he was able to compound the ingredients necessary to the tempering of the steel, and practice would soon perfect him in the work.

Orlando had been at work nearly a week at his forge without having once left the house. He had worked thus steady for two reasons. First, he wished to get the suit of mail done as soon as possible ; and, second, he had no desire to be gazed upon by a curious multitude, and troubled with impudent questions, from which latter cause he had kept the house. But finally, when the steel was all fashioned, and ready for weaving into the intricate network, our hero concluded to take a stroll through the city. It was in the evening, and Michael had gone out to do some purchasing for the larder.

"Are you going out ?" asked Cinthia, as she saw Orlando buckling on his sword.

"Yes, my sister. I think I have been shut up here about long enough ; and it is time that I had some fresh air. You won't be lonely, will you ?"

"O, no,—it isn't that, sir. I was thinking that you might wait until Michael came back ; and then he could bear you company."

"Ah," returned Vendorme, with a smile, "you don't understand my turn of mind. I want to study and reflect ; and so I prefer to walk alone."



"But, sir," pursued Cinthia, with evident concern, "you don't understand any better than I do. There may be danger if you venture out alone."

"Danger!" cried Orlando. "Danger in the streets of Milan! Pooh! impossible."

"Ah, my brother, you do not reflect. You have enemies in Milan; and they are high in power, too. And I think I have seen strange men lurking about our house of late. I know I saw one last night."

"Never mind, Cinthia. I thank you for your kindness of thought; but I cannot hive myself up here like a frightened criminal. You see I have my good sword for a companion, and while that is by me I shall not fear any lurking enemies. If Michael comes back before I do, you may tell him that I have gone to walk by the Saveso. Keep up a good heart, sweet sister, and don't let the ghosts and goblins come in to disturb you."

Cinthia tried to smile, but the effort was fruitless; yet she spoke cheerfully and urged Orlando to keep his eyes open for danger.

As our hero left the house he cast his eyes carefully about him, but saw nothing to attract particular attention. There were several persons in the street, but they seemed bent upon business of their own. The night was clear and calm, and the stars were out in all their glory. There had been a northerly breeze during the latter part of the day, so that some of the coolness of the far off Alps was mingled with the atmosphere. Slowly and thoughtfully the youth pursued his way, and when he reached the neighborhood of the eastern river he turned to the



left, and walked towards the old tilting-ground. As he was walking thus, with his head bowed, he heard footsteps behind him, and on turning he saw a man approaching. He had no desire to meet any one who might recognize him, so he turned away from the direct path, and walked more slowly. The man behind came up and passed on, turning when close by our hero and regarding him with evident interest ; but he did not stop; he only slackened his pace a little, and then moved on, and was soon out of sight beyond a clump of oleanders.

With no further thought of the passer, Vendorme pursued his way until he finally reached the scene of the tournament. The gates of the list were open, and he entered, and moved towards the platform where the duke had sat. When he reached the spot where he had knelt to receive the conqueror's scarf, he stopped, and bowed his head upon his bosom.

"Alas !" he murmured, "and thus the strife must end ! O, Rosabel, thou hast crossed my path like a brightly flashing star, blinding me for the while to all else of earth ; but thou canst no more bless me—no more beam upon me. Into my solitude of life I will carry the remembrance of thy sweet face ; and my soul shall be cheered by the belief that thou did'st feel for me some tender emotion. In a few short weeks my native city will know me no more. And so, sweet Rosabel, farewell !"

A little while after thus speaking the youth stood with his arms folded upon his breast, and then he turned from the spot. He had come near to the



gate, and was about to pass through, when a man, coming from without, ran full against him.

"How now, dog!" cried the stranger, starting back a pace. He was a huge, powerful fellow, topping our hero by almost a full head, and swelling out about the shoulders to the proportions of a giant.

Orlando could not be mistaken in the person. It was a noted bravo named Matteo—a fellow stained with a thousand crimes, but who had for the past few years served Hugh de Castro in the capacity of guardsman.

"How is this, villain?" the fellow continued, with a fierce oath. "Why do I find you lurking about this out-of-of-the-way place? Get thee hence, or I'll spit thee upon my sword, and serve thy body up to the fishes of the Saveso!"

Without stopping to consider, Orlando resented this right promptly.

"If you have business to intercept peaceful citizens, then know that I am exempt from your oversight; but if you seek a quarrel, you had better consider upon it before you begin."

"Ho, ho, my boy, you will oppose an officer of the guard, will you! Take that for your trouble." And as the bravo thus spoke, he struck the youth in the face.

Quick as thought Orlando sprang back, and drew his sword.

"Villain!" he shouted, "if you push me further, you shall rue it!"

"Ho, ho,—you draw you sword upon the guard,



do you ! Now, you shall find how fine a thing it is ! Mind—you have attacked me—you drew your sword first—you invite the conflict !”

In a moment it flashed upon our hero that this fellow had been set on to work by his superiors, and that a deadly conflict had been meant from the first. He now saw through the warning of Cinthia ; and he understood the business of the stranger who had passed him on the road. This was a plot of his enemies, and its meaning was, that he should die.

“I attack no man,” he said ; “but I shall defend myself to the utmost. I know you ; and I know your business.”

Orlando had prepared himself for the battle, and was all ready to meet his huge opponent, when he was startled by beholding two or three armed men emerge from the shadow of the paling ; and as near as he could judge from the glimmering of their armor, they were companions of the bravo.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### NEED OF MORE PLOTTING.

“What is this ?” cried Orlando Vendorme, starting back, and gazing sharply out upon the strangers who had arisen from behind the paling.

“They are nothing to me,” returned Matteo. “Look out for yourself.”



Our hero had but a moment for thought, but during that moment his thoughts comprehended considerable—comprehended enough to convince him that the men behind the fence were companions of the villain before him. Matteo had not turned his head ; he had not looked behind him ; and yet he showed by his speech that he knew just what the youth had seen. How could he have known this if he had not known who were at hand ?

But the question was no sooner answered in his own mind than he was called upon to defend himself ; for while he yet gazed to see if the strangers were inclined to advance, the bravo attacked him.

“Insolent cur !” the guardsman shouted, raising his sword, and preparing for the blow, “you have sealed your own doom. This is the fate of those who interfere with officers on duty !”

Matteo was probably astonished when he found that his sword spent its force upon empty air ; but he was not long in recovering himself, and his next blow was given with more care and precision. He did not hit his mark, however ; and a fierce oath escaped him. Our hero very quickly discovered that his antagonist was a mere lout at handling the sword ; though his immense physical power gave him fatal advantages over ordinary swordsmen.

“Forbear !” cried Orlando, after the third passage. “I want no more of it.”

“Ha, ha—you don’t, eh ! But I do. I must have your life—Ha ! Take care—here it is !”

And so it was ; but not as Matteo had meant. He fancied that he was about to cleave off the head



of his opponent ; but instead thereof the point of the youth's sword entered his body directly below the arm, passing through his heart ; and, in a very few moments more, his gigantic body tumbled over upon the ground ; but not, however, until he had cried out in sharp, agonizing tones that he was killed.

Before Vendorme could fairly recover himself from this shock, the men whom he had seen behind the paling, three in number, rushed in upon him with their swords drawn ; and as they came near he saw that they were what he had supposed them to be—members of the ducal guard.

“Hold !” he shouted, starting back against the edge of the platform. “What means this violence ? Who are you ?”

“We'll let you know who we are,” returned the foremost of the guardsmen, stopping for an instant when he reached the body of his fallen companion. “I think for once we'll take a dead prisoner into our hands !—Look, my brothers,” he continued, addressing his followers, “this wretch has slain our lieutenant, and he acts as though he meant to serve us the same. There's no mercy now !”

With fierce oaths the three stout soldiers set upon our hero, and the appearance was, that they would soon overcome him. They evidently looked to see him fall at once ; but in this they were disappointed. Still they were very good swordsmen, and so keenly did they ply their blades that the youth had as much as he could do to defend himself. Had he but taken the precaution to wear his shirt of mail,



he might have laughed at their blows while he swept them from his path ; but as it was, he was forced to defend every part of his body with his own sword.

“ Saint Peter ! ” cried one of the villains, “ can we not hit this fellow ? Let me take a fair sweep at him. There ! ”

If the rascal had kept his tongue to himself his furious onset might have accomplished something ; but his boastful words had caused his companions to fall back so that he might have room ; and thus, for the moment, he was the youth's only antagonist. His sword came down with a powerful sweep, but was caught and turned away, and before he could recover himself he was pricked through the neck. At this time the other two lunged forward, and they might have borne the young armorer down had not the play been suddenly interrupted.

“ ORLANDO ! ORLANDO ! ” cried a voice from the gate-way, accompanied by the sound of rushing feet.

“ Ha !——here !——here ! Quick, my good Michael ! ”

It was Michael Totilla, and just in season. As he came near he saw how the case stood ; and, without hesitation, he drew his sword and cleaved one of the villains heads clean from its shoulders ; and in a moment more the remaining ruffian was sent to earth with his skull almost severed in twain.

“ By the mass, my good Michael,” said Orlando, as soon as he had time to take breath, “ this is a curious work.”



"Indeed it is, my master," returned the artizan, gazing around him. "If I mistake not, yonder lies the huge body of Matteo."

"Yes," replied Orlando. "He attacked me first ; and as I slew him, these other three followed his example." And thereupon the youth related minutely all that had taken place.

"I came just in time," said Michael, after he had heard the story. "I feared there might be some danger when Cinthia told me that you had gone out ; for I knew there had been people lurking around the house ; so I came away after you as quickly as possible ; and my instinct was true. They meant to finish you, surely."

"Aye. And who, think you, planned this thing ?" queried Orlando.

"It must have been some one who held control of the guard," replied Michael.

"Certainly ; and I think the duke is the prime mover. But what shall we do now ?"

This was a question which Michael did not feel competent to answer.

"You have but to command," he said, "and I will obey ; but I can give no advice in this case."

Orlando reflected awhile, and finally he said :

"I think I will go home and sleep upon it, and in the morning I shall be prepared to decide. We will let these bodies remain as they are, and those may find them who will. Can you recommend anything better ?"

"No, my master."



“Then let us return.”

The armorers reached their house without further molestation, and as they did not wish that Cinthia should know what had transpired, they said nothing of the bloody fray, but conversed as though nothing unusual had happened ; and so they retired to their rest without awakening any suspicion in the mind of the anxious wife.

On the following morning, Orlando had made up his mind to go to the duke and make a plain statement of what had transpired.

“It is better so,” he said. “Of course the finding of those dead bodies will make much noise, and it is not impossible that the work may be traced to us ; in which case our silence would weigh against us. I shall repair directly to the audience chamber, while it is open to the public, and there make my statement. What think you ?”

Michael might not have advised such a course ; but now that his master had presented it, he thought it a good one. And Cinthia, too, finally came to look upon it in the same light. She had learned what had transpired, and her gratitude for Orlando's escape had partially overcome the disposition to fear.

“Certainly,” she said, after due deliberation ; “you must go. If you openly avow the truth, the duke will not dare to do you open harm ; and as for his secret hate, I do not think that this event can increase it. In short, I do not believe that Manfred can have any greater disposition to harm you on account of this, than he has already had.”



"You speak wisely," said Orlando ; "and your voice has decided me. My course is plain, and I shall follow it, trusting in God for the triumph of right."

At a proper time our hero arrayed himself in full knightly costume, with the jeweled cross upon his breast, and the conqueror's scarf upon his shoulder, in which state he proceeded to the ducal palace. When he entered the audience chamber he found quite a crowd collected, and the duke was just questioning some of the guard concerning the death of Matteo and his companions. The event had created quite an excitement, though it was not the cause of much mourning.

"If Matteo has been slain, depend upon it, he deserved it," remarked a man who wore the garb of a merchant.

"Aye," responded another ; "and we are well rid of a villain, too."

"You speak truly," added a third person. "I have heard it whispered—and I believe it true—that this same Matteo has been engaged with the robbers that infest the country, and that his uniform has been a cloak for many outrages."

Orlando heard all this, and he saw that the speakers were men of influence in society ; and he observed, furthermore, that those who stood near, and had overheard the remarks, seemed to sympathize with them. This gave him new heart, and he approached the ducal chair with more confidence than he had before felt.

When Manfred first beheld our hero, his brow



grew dark and scowling, and his frame quivered from head to foot ; but when he saw how the people made way for the youth, and how they murmured their admiration of his noble bearing, he brought his feelings under control, and received the knight as was befitting to the rank.

“Ah, Sir Orlando,” he said, struggling mightily to form his speech, “you have come just in season to hear news. Four of our ducal guard were killed last night upon the tilting ground.”

“The event is not new to me, my lord,” returned Orlando ; “and it is to explain the affair that has called me here this morning.”

“Ha,” cried the duke, with a slight start ; “if such be the case, I will give thee private audience.”

“No, my lord. I prefer to speak publicly. The matter is one of public interest, and I would have my statement made in the presence of those who have already heard something of the event. I think such is the proper course.”

However much Manfred may have wished to hush the voice of the knight, he dared not, after this, refuse to hear his statement before the audience ; so, with as good grace as he could command, he directed him to proceed.

“My lord,” said Orlando, speaking in a bold, frank tone, “thus it was.” And thereupon he gave a full and particular account of his meeting with Matteo—of the unprovoked attempt of the huge bravo upon his life—of his slaying the wretch—of the subsequent attack by the three guardsmen who had been concealed behind the paling—of his killing one of



them—of the opportune arrival of his friend, Michael Totilla—and of the final death of the other two assassins.

“Thus did it transpire, my lord ; and I have taken this first opportunity to make the matter known to you, that you may pronounce upon it as in your wisdom you may determine.”

Hugh de Castro moved to the duke's side, and whispered into his ear, but Manfred shook his head.

“It is not probable,” said de Castro, aloud, “that our guardsmen would thus provoke a peaceable citizen without cause. There must be some mistake.”

“It is most marvellous,” added the duke.

“Aye,” responded Orlando, “you may well say that, my lord. But,” he continued, casting his eyes around the chamber, “perhaps your highness has been deceived touching the character of this Matteo. May he not have been a villain ! May he not have been a robber ? May he not have been in the habit of using the authority of his office as a cloak for gross crimes ?”

“Call for the evidence, and you shall have witnesses by the score !” said a voice in a distant part of the room.

Manfred sprang from his seat, with the fire of passion starting from every feature.

“Who speaks ? Who dares to interrupt me ?”

There was no answer to this ; but as the duke cast his eyes over the multitude he could plainly see that the mass of those present were ready to echo the sentiment of the unknown speaker. And again he wrestled with himself, and gained the victory.



“Sir Orlando Vendorme,” he said, with a slight hiss in his tone—for he could not quite hide all feeling—“I must accept your version of this strange affair, because, by virtue of your knightly vows, you are subject to a higher tribunal should you perjure yourself. But, fair sir,” he went on, with a softening manner, “I do not doubt your statements ; and I thank you for your promptness in giving me information.”

“Is my presence required further?” inquired the youth.

“No. We would be glad to confer with you on other subjects, but other business is upon our hands, and time presses.”

With a low bow Orlando withdrew, and as he passed from the chamber, a large number followed him out into the court, some to greet him on the score of old acquaintance, and some to gaze upon he who had overcome the prince and the captain in the joust, and slain the giant Matteo in a hand-to-hand encounter.

Manfred seemed to have little heart for the dispatch of business after Vendorme had gone ; and as soon as possible he cleared his docket, and left the audience-chamber, his captain following close upon his heels.

“By the blood of my heart,” cried the duke, when he reached his closet, “what shall be done now ? Hath this fellow a charmed life ?”

“He hath had most marvellous fortune,” replied de Castro, smiting himself with vexation.



"But the end is not yet. And yet I would see the end of this upstart, my captain."

"You shall see it, my lord."

"But how? I thought when Matteo was sworn to the work, that he had him most surely."

"So did I; but we were mistaken. However, his lease of liberty is not long."

"Mark me, de Castro; our own safety may depend upon a speedy removal of this Vendorme."

"How can that be, my lord?"

"I don't know. I can only assure you that I feel it. Did you not mark how the crowd stood by him? how they gloried in his deeds? and how they followed him from the chamber? I dare not trust such inflammable material with my people. These Milanese are a passionate set, and ripe for mischief. And, my captain, I do not trust much to their love for me."

"True, my lord."

"Nor in their love for you, either, de Castro."

"True again, your highness. I know them as well as you do."

"And do you not believe that they would glory in following such a champion as this Orlando Vendorme, if they should once fall into his lead?"

"By my soul, I do."

"And," pursued the duke, "his knighthood would give him good character for such leadership."

"You speak my own thoughts, my lord."

"Then we must have him. We have failed once—"

"But," interrupted de Castro, smiting his fists



together, "we will not fail again! I have a plan, safe and sure."

"Mind you," said Manfred, "there must be no noise—no outward sign; for I know that the youth hath powerful friends."

"Rest easy, my lord. I have it in my mind, and the execution shall be swift and secret. There shall be no second escape. The upstart shall disappear as quietly as the sun goes down at the close of day."

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE END OF A DARK JOURNEY.

Orlando Vendorme returned to his shop, where he found Michael and his wife extremely anxious.

"Not wholly on your account have I worried," said Cinthia, after our hero had taken a seat. "My husband is somewhat implicated, and I have feared for him."

"You need fear no more," returned Orlando. "The duke has heard the whole truth, and he has dismissed the case. If there is danger beyond this, there must be another pretext for it."

"For myself," remarked Michael, "I have no idea that Manfred will cherish vengeance, but for you I have not the assurance."

"I understand you," said Orlando, "and I am pre-



pared to have a care for myself. I know that the duke hates me, and I know that the prince hates me, and I know that Hugh de Castro hates me, and furthermore, I have become convinced that they will try to remove me from their way. Why they should feel thus—why they should regard me with such deadly hatred—I cannot understand.”

“I can understand it,” said Cinthia. “I think it all very plain.”

Both the men regarded her curiously.

“The duke and the prince have not forgotten that Rosabel of Bergamo loves you.”

“I think she is well cured of that folly by this time,” said Orlando.

“No, no,” returned Cinthia, who did not like to have her ideas disputed. “The love of a true woman is not so easily turned from its object. I can read her heart as plainly as though it beat in my own bosom. I know that her affections did once become fixed on you, and I do not think that your subsequent misfortunes have weakened the emotion. What is the inducement presented to her to turn from you? It is the prospect of marriage with the brutal Ludovico. Merciful Heaven! what a choice is that! Do you think that her emotion when she bestowed the conqueror’s scarf upon you was without meaning? I tell you, Orlando Vendorme, the duke and the prince have reason to fear you. I can see it. I know where the trouble is. The castle of Bergamo, with all its belongings, is the prize, and they cannot afford to lose it.”

“Never mind,” interposed Michael, with an impa-



tient gesture ; "let that be as it may, of one thing we are assured : There is danger, and our friend must keep clear of it."

"You speak truly," said Orlando, "and I have resolved upon my course. I shall finish the shirt of mail for that young lord of Hartburg as soon as I can, and then I shall quit Milan forever !" He spoke sadly, and with his hand pressed upon his bosom. In a few moments he raised his head, and added :

"And while I remain here, I shall keep myself within the old house. There is nothing to call me forth, and I shall finish my work more speedily. I think that will be the safest course."

"Aye," cried Michael, "the safest by far. Adhere to that, and there can be no danger. And—perhaps—when you leave Milan, you will allow me to go with you."

"We'll see about that, Michael."

"I am in earnest, my master."

"Very well—we'll see. And now I think it is time we had dinner—eh, Cinthia?"

After dinner Orlando put on his working garb and took his place at the bench, where he worked rapidly until late into the night. On the following morning he came down, and found Cinthia alone in the kitchen. He crossed the room several times, and twice he moved as though he would go towards the shop, but he did not go. Finally he stopped near to where the housewife stood.

"Cinthia," he said, with a hesitation that betrayed his emotion, "you spoke yesterday of the princess



Rosabel. You said that she loved me. Have you seen her since I was banished from the city?"

"Goodness me!" cried the little woman, "what a question. Where should I have seen her?"

"I did not know—"

"Ah, my brother, I am sorry I spoke as I did. I did not think, when I introduced the subject of the princess, that you cherished anything like love for her."

"And did you think that the love of a true man could not be constant?" returned Orlando, with a tinge of bitterness in his tone.

"Forgive me, my brother! O, forgive me! I did not think what I was saying. I did not know as you ever gave your heart to the princess."

"Aye, Cinthia—mad as it may have been, I did give her my heart, and I allowed myself to dream of her as a prize to be won."

"How could you hope to win her?"

"She would have solved the problem herself, if the duke had not interfered."

"I know," said Cinthia "but you cannot hope for that opportunity again."

"I know not why," returned Orlando, with more boldness. "If she was willing to flee with me when I was but an humble artizan, why should she not be willing to do it now that I am elevated to the order of knighthood?"

"But she was driven to desperation then."

"How?"

"By prospect of marriage with a man whom she despised."



"And has she not the same prospect before her now?"

"Ah, my brother, you must not let your thoughts run in that channel. It is dangerous. If it does not bring destruction upon you, it will ruin your peace of mind. Let the princess wed in her legitimate sphere, and do you look in another direction."

Orlando was about to reply, when he was interrupted by the entrance of Michael, and so the conversation dropped.

The shirt of mail progressed rapidly, and the workmen believed they were producing a piece of armor which could not be excelled. The body of the garment was finished, and the shoulder-pieces attached, and it was then put to the test. The finest tempered blade made no impression upon it, and it turned the point of a lance surely.

It was late at night, and Michael proposed that they should suspend their labors and retire.

"I cannot go yet," said Orlando. "I must attach this arm-piece. But you can go. Go, Michael, and leave me here. It will not take me a great while."

Michael Totilla hesitated, but finally he replied:

"If you wish to work here alone, I suppose there can be no harm in my retiring; though, to tell you the truth, Orlando, I would rather that you should leave the task until morning. You have done enough for one day. Come, let us go."

"No—not now. If you think there can be danger, you will cause me to laugh at you. The doors are secured, and the windows closed,"



Without further remonstrance Michael bid his companion good-night, and left the shop.

Orlando worked away upon the subtile meshes for half an hour or more after he had been left alone, and then he leaned back from his bench, and murmured to himself of one who occupied a deep place in his thoughts. He was thus engaged when he fancied that he heard a light rap upon the door that opened into the street. He listened, and in a few moments the sound was repeated. It was a rap—there could be no mistake. He arose and moved cautiously to the door, where he listened once more, and pretty soon the rap came again. It was very low and careful, and seemed too delicate for the summons of a man. He reflected a moment, and resolved that he would at least find out who was there. He asked the question, and the answer he received was a request for him to open the door.

Surely it was a female voice that spoke.

"Who is it?" he repeated. "I cannot open my doors at this hour to a stranger."

"I cannot give my name here," replied the applicant. "If my voice is not a sufficient passport, I must go away as I came. I am alone, and must not be seen by curious eyes. Will you not open to me?"

Orlando did not think of danger now. Aye—that voice was a passport to his confidence—not that he had ever heard it before, but simply because it was the voice of a female, and without further question he unbarred the door, and drew it open. A woman entered, and as she did so bade him close the door as quickly as possible.



"I must not be seen," she said, "or there may be danger to one who is already in danger enough."

Our hero closed and barred the door as he had been requested, and then turned towards his strange visitor. She was enveloped in a large cloak of dark cloth, which completely covered her head and concealed her face.

"Lady, your wish has been obeyed," announced Orlando, as he approached the spot where she stood near his bench.

"I think I speak with Orlando Vendorme?"

"You do."

"Are you alone?"

"Only you and myself are present ; and I think there are none others stirring beneath this roof. Now, lady, may I know who and what you are?"

The visitor threw her cloak back from her head and shoulders, revealing a pair of sparkling black eyes, and a very pretty young face. She was not bewitching, nor was she beautiful ; but she was fair and intelligent, and better looking than the majority of females of her age. And when she spoke she exhibited a set of pearly teeth, and a curious smile played around the little dimples in her cheeks and chin. In short, as the youth gazed upon her, he fancied that she was just such a being as the princesses and maidens of the Orient used to send on secret missions of love.

"Sir knight," spoke the girl, a little uneasily, "I have come on a mission from one whom you will not disobey. Do you remember Rosabel of Bergamo?"



"Yes," replied Orlando, quickly. "I remember her as one who can never be forgotten."

"Would you obey a message from her?"

"If I had assurance that it came from her I would obey it, though mortal danger stood in the way."

"You speak as my mistress hoped you would speak, sir knight; and I think I may deliver her message. Ever since you were banished she has been threatened with the hateful prospect of giving her hand to Ludovico; and thus far she has escaped by such means as were in her power. A part of the time she was really sick, as you may have heard; but her excuses will avail her no longer. She must have help, or her doom is sealed. In this great need, fair sir, she calls upon you. Will you help her?"

"Aye, with my very life, if need be," cried Orlando, with soul-sent energy. "Point out to me the way in which it can be done, and I am at your service."

"The princess herself must tell you that," said the messenger, with another of those peculiar smiles; but the smile died out in a very few seconds, and again she showed signs of uneasiness.

"Lady," returned our hero, laying his hand upon his bosom, "I am at your service in behalf of the Princess Rosabel. And I say this without hope of reward other than that which must come to me through the knowledge that I have rendered needed



assistance to one so lovely and deserving. My life is her's, and to her welfare is it devoted."

"Then you will go with me to the palace, sir."

"Did the princess send you on such an errand?"

"Yes. If you were willing to come, and would not betray her, she would see you as soon as possible. This is the third night I have watched for you, and if another day finds my mistress without help, it may be too late. She is very anxious."

"I will go with you."

"But you must not be recognized in the street. I can find a safe entrance to the palace; but we may meet some one on the way who might know the champion knight, and that would be dangerous."

"The caution is a proper one, lady; and I will be with you in a moment sufficiently disguised. Will you wait here?"

**The** messenger answered in the affirmative, and Orlando retired to an adjacent room, where he buckled on his sword, and threw a long cloak over his shoulders. He stepped as lightly as possible, for he did not wish to arouse Michael or his wife; and this thought of his friends brought another thought to his mind: Ought he to leave without letting them know something of his absence? When he returned to the shop, he asked the girl if the business in hand would be likely to detain him beyond the night.

"I do not know," she replied. "But why do you ask?"

"I was thinking," said Orlando, "that I ought not to leave my friends in suspense. If they arise



in the morning and find me gone, they will be very uneasy."

"Indeed, fair sir, you forget the first stipulation. A message left for these people touching your absence might lead to a betrayal of your presence with the princess. No, no, if you go with me, you must leave no sign behind. But, sir, you are not urged. If you have one thought of hesitation, the princess would not have you come."

"I have no thought of hesitation," cried our hero, emphatically. "I am ready to follow you ; or shall I lead the way?"

"You had better allow me to lead," said the messenger ; "as I shall take a way which will be most likely to lead us to the palace unobserved."

"All right. Lead on."

The girl passed out from the shop, and when Orlando had followed her he stopped and locked the door behind him, leaving the key in the lock. He did this because he thought that Michael, when he found the key thus in the morning, would know that he had gone out of his own free will.

"Now," said the girl, drawing her own cloak over her head, "let us hurry on. Cover your head."

The youthful knight did as directed, and followed on without speaking, his guide leading by a quiet, unlighted way, where few people traveled in the night. They reached the palace by a small postern to which the girl had a key ; and having traversed a wide court, they came to a porch, the door of which opened to the touch. Beyond this was a vaulted passage, so dark that the eye was of no use.



"Give me your hand," said the girl. "I know the way, and will lead you carefully. A light might betray us."

This seemed all right to our hero, and he followed on without hesitation. They walked slowly in the utter darkness—walked on for some distance—and finally began to descend. At the foot of a flight of stone steps they came to a place where there seemed to be a door, and beyond this the atmosphere was damp and chill, like a deep, close cellar.

"Do you hesitate?" asked the fair guide.

"No," replied Orlando; "I do not hesitate; but I was wondering why we took so strange a course."

"If you knew the secrets of this great old palace," said the girl, "you would not wonder at all. If we would reach the apartments of the princess without being seen by the guard, we must go lower still. Since the new wing was built, where the duke now abides, the old apartments of state have been given up to the women; and it so happens that Rosabel occupies the rooms formerly appropriated to the use of the chamberlain, and which were directly over, and in communication with, the dungeons. Unknown to the duke, Rosabel has gained possession of the keys of these deep recesses, and if she leaves the palace to-night, she will come this way."

This speech reassured the knight, and without further question he followed on. Very slowly did the girl grope her way, with one hand upon the wall; and at length there was another descent. This time the stairs wound around in a complete circle, and at the foot they found the air colder and more damp.



"It is not much further," said the guide. "In a little while we will find light. Step carefully—carefully. There—if you will stop here I will bring a lamp. We are beyond the walk of the sentinels."

"Hark !"

"What do you hear?"

"I thought I heard a step close at hand."

"It was but your fancy, sir."

"Why do you tremble so?"

"I have been excited. This is strange business for me. I have not the nerves of a man. Will you wait here, sir?"

Orlando said he would wait; and yet he did not like the feelings that were beginning to force themselves upon him. It was a very strange way of passage to the apartments of the princess; and then he was sure that he had heard a heavy step close at hand, as though some one had stumbled. And, furthermore, what made the girl tremble so? If she was used to the passage, and was faithfully serving her beautiful mistress, why should she be so strangely moved? But it was too late now to retrace his steps, or to call for an explanation, for the damsel had gone, and he was alone.

"Hark! What sound was that?"

A low, harsh creaking, as of the grating of rusty hinges!

"And that! What is it?"

The clang of a door, and the rattle of bolts and chains!

Orlando Vendorme starts forward with a wild movement; but he is too late. He is shut in by



walls of stone, and an iron door is closed upon him! He hears a sound as of the shuffling of feet, and the murmur of voices ; and then all is still as death, and as dark as the grave. He puts out his hands, and gropes his way around ; but the circuit is very narrow, and there is no passage beyond. He cries out for help,—he asks why this foul thing is done ; but only the dull, dismal echo of his own voice comes back in answer !

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## CHAPTER IX.

### FAILING.

The duke of Milan arose in the morning, and when he entered his closet he found Hugh de Castro there ; and at the same time the prince Ludovico came in by another door.

“Ah, my captain,” cried Manfred, “I see success stamped upon thy face. There has been no miscarriage this time?”

“No, my lord.”

“What,” exclaimed the prince, starting forward, and, for the first time since the tournament, moving without any show of lameness, “is the dog dead?”

“Not dead,” returned de Castro; “but he is safe within our power.”

“No, no,” cried Ludovico; “he is not safe for us while he is alive.”



"He is where he can very easily be disposed of," remarked the captain, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Stop a moment," said the duke, putting out his hand to his son, who was upon the point of speaking again. "Let me have the captain's report. Now, de Castro, what have you done?"

"My lord," was the reply, "I have seen Orlando Vendorme lodged in the deepest dungeon of the old palace. He is in the place where Marmori died; where Sforza died; where Deletti died; and where the life of even the great Yusef wore itself away. He is down in that rock-bound pit, and the door of triple iron is bolted upon him."

"Did you put him there, de Castro?"

"I closed the door upon him, my lord."

"Then there are others, beside ourselves, who know his whereabouts?"

"One other your highness."

"Only one?"

"That is all."

"Who is it?"

"My lord, a lowly person, of my own household, did the work for me; and it was done upon the express condition that the name of the doer should never pass my lips in connection with the deed. It has been done—done most faithfully. The outcast was found alone—he was led away from his shop in the dead of night, following of his own free will, and lodged in the deep dungeon without being seen by other eyes than those engaged in the work."

"But how did he follow so willingly?"



"The name of the princess of Bergamo was used, my lord."

"Ha—and he fancied that he was being led to her chamber, did he?" cried Ludovico.

"Exactly," replied de Castro.

"Good!" said the duke. "And, my captain, since your work has been so faithfully executed, I will not ask for the name of your agent."

"And now," asked the prince, eagerly, "how is the dog to be despatched?"

"He is despatched already," replied Manfred.

"What—is he killed?"

"No, my son; there is no need of that. He is where mortal eye can never see him alive again, and there let him rot! I have a reason for this. When the fellow is missed, there will be much inquiry for him; and that inquiry may come from high quarters. When it does come, I must be able to swear that the knight has suffered no injury at my hands. I shall take that fearful oath, which no knight has yet dared to break, that, to my knowledge, no hair of Orlando Vendorme's head has been harmed. My word, given thus, cannot be doubted; and so we shall escape the accusation."

"His highness is right," said de Castro, addressing the prince. "It had better be so."

A little reflection convinced Ludovico that his father had adopted the proper course; and without further opposition he gave in. But he did not wear a pleasant look as he thus assented. He was not wholly satisfied. His feelings of enmity towards the prisoner were deeper than those entertained by his



father. Vendorme had overcome him in the list, and exposed him to the ridicule of the multitude; but that was as nothing compared with the other cause of hatred he had. Orlando Vendorme had touched him in a deeper, tenderer spot. Upon the outcast the princess had lavished her affections—the maiden who was to become his wife hated him, and loved the armorer. He was willing that Vendorme should die in his dungeon; but he wanted some keener sense of triumph than he had yet experienced. He wanted to gloat over his fallen rival.

“I think,” said the duke, “that this matter is finished.”

“Safely and surely,” responded de Castro.

“And what says my son?”

“Let the dog rot in his dungeon!” And as the prince thus spoke he strode from the apartment.

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Orlando Vendorme when he found that there was no way of egress from his prison, took some little pains to discover the exact character of the place. That the dungeon was very deep down below the surface of the earth was evident from the chill and heavy dampness of the air; and that the walls were thick and solid he knew from the echo when he stepped. Four paces measured the distance across the dungeon in one direction, and six paces in the other. There was no bed—no stool—not even the projection of a rock, upon which he could recline; so, when he sought to rest his weary limbs, he sank down upon the damp, cold pavement, and leaned against the



wall. In this condition he slept. When he awoke, he fancied that the night must have passed; but there was no light in his prison. He arose and groped around awhile, and then sat down again. An hour—another hour—and another passed, and yet no light came to him. Did daylight ever reach that place?

“No, no,” he murmured to himself, “the sun never looks into this depth. It must be far into the day, for I know that I have been here many hours. Will they not bring me food? I am hungry, and my throat is parched. Hark!”

He heard a footstep approaching, and he arose to his feet. Pretty soon there was a grating sound close at hand, and directly a stream of light struggled into the place. The prisoner looked, and he was able to discover that a little wicket had been opened in the door—a wicket not larger than a man’s hand, and even at that guarded by a bar.

“Orlando Vendorme!” pronounced a voice.

“I am here,” answered our hero, moving towards the door.

“Ha, ha, ha; you are there, are you!”

It was the voice of the prince Ludovico. The first speech had been so strangely echoed by the solid walls that it had not been recognized.

“How do you find yourself, sir knight of the silver cross?”

“What mean you?” demanded Orlando, coming close to the wicket, which was very near on a level with his face. “If I mistake not, you are Ludovico of Milan?”



"Aye, sir—I am; and I have come to bid you farewell!"

How those words struck into Vendorme's soul! Their meaning was too apparent. And yet he could not give credit to the evidence.

"How, my lord? Do you say farewell?"

"Yes."

"Why do you say farewell? Are you going away?"

"Yes. I am going away from this place. Ho, ho—you are a dweller in the palace, sir knight; and you are highly honored, too. Few men are so fortunate as you. Even the duke may, by some stroke of unkind fate, find himself without a home; but you are better provided for. So long as you live this roof shall cover you! Is not that a consolation?"

Orlando could now see the outlines of Ludovico's face, as the light of the torch fell upon them, and the features were distorted by a most fiendish expression. The meaning of the demon could be no longer mistaken.

"Sir prince," the prisoner cried, with a realizing sense of his own helplessness, "do you mean that I am here to die—that I shall not leave this place alive?"

"Aye, Orlando Vendorme, I mean it! You have looked upon the sun for the last time! For the last time have you seen the blooming earth! and for the last time have you breathed the fresh air! Aye—and one thing more let me tell you: For the last time have you tasted food, and for the last time pressed the thirst-quenching draught to your lips!"



"Oh! no! no!" exclaimed the prisoner, clasping his hands in frightful agony. "There is no fiend in Tartarian depths could mete out such a doom!"

"And yet, Vendorme, such a doom is yours! Did you think the prince of Milan had no way of revenge? Did you think you could put your heel upon our house? Once you were banished from Milan, and for a deadly offence; you might have escaped further punishment. But you dared to brave our authority. Did you think, when you smote me down in the list, that that would be the end of it? Did you think that we would allow a dog of an outcast to wear a laurel upon my defeat?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Orlando, "and is this the return of a brave man in defeat? Can you seek such revenge because I overcame you in the list! Give me my liberty, and I will give you any honorable satisfaction you may demand. I will meet both you and Hugh de Castro—I, single-handed, against the pair of you. I will meet you even at greater odds. I will strip off all my armor, and you may be clad in steel from head to foot. I will meet you with my dagger against your sword. I will meet you without shield or buckler. Will you not grant me this?"

"No!" thundered Ludovico. "This revenge is too sweet to be given up. You die where you are!"

"And this is the keeping of your knightly oath, sir prince."

"Hold, dog!" cried the youthful tyrant, hissing his words out between his clenched teeth. "If you imagine that I exult thus over your fate because you



won the prize at the tournament you are much mistaken. Did you not know that I had planned to make Rosabel of Bergamo my wife?"

"I did—I have heard so," replied Orlando, with quivering voice.

"Aye—you know it, and the mention of her name should open your eyes to the true cause of my vengeance."

"For my friendship towards the princess," said our hero, "I was banished. What have I done since?"

"Why did you follow your guide hither last night?" retorted the prince. "Ah—you hesitate, do you? Oho—you think to play upon my innocence! By the powers of darkness, my doomed one, I know very well how your feelings have run. When you came hither, you fancied you were coming to my lady's chamber. Out upon thee, dog! Thy doom is fixed. Here shalt thou lie and starve!—starve and rot! When your flesh is tender enough, the wolves shall pick your bones! And so—farewell!" With this Ludovico closed the wicket.

Orlando drew his sword and started forward, meaning, in his frenzy, to plunge it through the open space, but ere he had gained the door the slide had been closed, and he was once more in total darkness. He cried aloud to the prince—cried for mercy—cried for one moment more of intercourse—but no answer came back save that same horrible, echo, like the voice of the tomb. When the prisoner knew that Ludovico had gone, he sank back against



the wall, and let his sword drop from his nerveless grasp.

“Merciful God!” he gasped, in a hoarse, horrified whisper, “is this thing possible? O, it is too dreadful!”

And yet, when he reflected, he could not doubt the words he had heard. When he became more calm, he stooped down and picked up his sword, and then took his seat once more upon the cold stones. No food!—no drink! He had been hungry, but the feeling had gone from him, and he was now athirst. And the thirst was more pressing than had been the hunger. Gradually his tongue became parched, and the torture began. He sucked the slimy drops from the damp walls, but the temporary cooling of the tongue could not quench the fire that was creeping down into his system. Once again he sought the door, and tried if he could not find some way of opening it; but he might as well have knocked at the base of the Alps for a passage through their solid foundations. He cried out with all his power, in hopes that some kind ear might catch the sound of his voice! but when the dull, heavy echo fell back upon him, he knew that his tones could not reach far beyond his prison.

“And thus,” he murmured, as he sank back exhausted against the wall, “ends the earthly course of Orlando Vendorme! Here come all my hopes and aspirations to their grave! From this place there can be no escape. No, no,—I know my enemies too well. They will never relent. The wolf would sooner quit his prey than would these



monsters loose their hold on me. O, if I could but get one word to Michael. If I could tell him where I was ! But he can finish the shirt of mail, and the lord of Hartburg will get his coveted prize. Ah—that meeting with that strange boy was most unfortunate for me. Had I never met him, I should never have been knighted ; and if I had not been knighted, I should not have returned to Milan, and if I had not returned to Milan, I should not now be here. But—so runs the record of my fate ; and it may be that such was ordained from the beginning. Oh ! this burning of my soul !—this fire in my throat ! Help !—mercy !”

Again and again did the famishing man press his parched and swollen tongue against the damp rocks, but the relief became less and less.

“I have one friend left,” he whispered, and he rested his weakening hand upon his sword-hilt. “Why should I die thus, in more than mortal agony, when one prick of this faithful blade will give me quick release from all my sufferings ? O, if no help can come—if this dark prison must be my end of earth—it is better that I should die so—far, far better ! And God will pardon me for the deed !”

But not yet did the sufferer strike to end his pains. Once more he cried for help,—it was a low and feeble cry, for his voice was failing ; and when he could cry no more he raised his whispered accents in prayer to heaven.

Once he thought he heard footsteps again at the door of the dungeon ; and when he raised his head



he saw faint beams of light struggling in through the grated wicket. He staggered to his feet, and begged for mercy. How long he had been there he could not tell. It must have been days—two—three and perhaps more.

“Is he dead?” he heard a voice ask.

“He may be,” another voice replied.

“No! no!” the prisoner gasped, starting forward, and pressing his face against the bars. “O, in heaven’s name give me help!”

“You’ll get help soon enough,” said the first voice, in reply. It was the Duke of Milan who spoke.

“Let us go,” added the second voice. This was Hugh de Castro; and he spoke as though he liked not the scene.

The prisoner would have put his thin hands through the opening to beg once more for mercy, but the wicket was closed suddenly, and he was again in darkness. And now the darkness was more horrible than before. Faint and sick, and racked with pain, he sunk down upon the hard, cold stones; and once again his quivering, fevered hand sought to grasp the hilt of his sword. Alas, even the strength to command that sole remaining friend was gone from him.





## CHAPTER X.

### THE DUKE IS PREPARED FOR MORE WORK.

When Michael Totilla arose in the morning, and found that Orlando was gone, he felt somewhat uneasy; but when he found the key of the shop-door upon the outer side of the lock, he supposed that his young master might have slipped out just to take a breath of fresh air; so he waited till the breakfast hour quite easily. That hour came, but no Orlando appeared. They waited an hour, and still he did not come,

"There is something wrong," said Michael.

"Of course there is," responded Cinthia.

"I felt it last night, when I left him alone at his work," pursued the armorer. "I ought not to have done it. And yet he must have gone out of his own free will; for I found the door locked, and the key upon the outside."

"He must have gone out for a ramble," suggested Cinthia, "intending to return in a short time, and some trouble has overtaken him."

So it appeared to Michael; and without further words he started out to make inquiries. All the forenoon he wandered up and down the city; but



not a trace could he find of his missing master; and at the dinner hour he returned to his home, sad and dispirited, blaming himself for having left Orlando alone.

Early in the afternoon a stranger called at the shop, and inquired for Vendorme. Michael knew that he had seen his visitor before, but he could not tell where.

"Do you seek the armorer on business?" he inquired.

"Yes," replied the stranger; "you can call it business if you please. But I come to learn if all is well with him."

"Are you interested?" asked Michael, regarding his visitor curiously.

"Yes, Michael Totilla, I am interested; and since I know that you are a true friend to the youth, I will tell you why I am interested. You have seen Theodore of Hartburg?"

"Yes."

"And Vendorme has been at work for him?"

"Yes. He is making a fine mail for him."

"Exactly."

"And I am Theodore's servant. My name is Gaspard."

"Aye," cried Michael; "I recollect you now. Yes, yes—I saw you with the Saxon knights at the tournament."

"I was there," returned Gaspard, "and I saw you when you bore down your opponents in the ring. My master had two reasons for feeling interested in the welfare of Orlando Vendorme. First, he wanted



the marvellous shirt of mail, which Vendorme alone could make ; and, furthermore, he owed to the heroic youth a debt of gratitude which he wished to pay ; so he determined, if the thing were possible, to watch over his interests ; and to this end he sent me here to have an eye upon him. This morning I missed him ; and now the question is, where shall we find him ? When my young Lord of Hartburg asks what has happened to Orlando Vendorme, what shall I tell him ?”

“Indeed, I know not,” replied Michael. “But if you be a friend, as I now believe you are, you will help me to search.”

“And where would you search ?”

“I would search at the ducal palace, if I dared. I have already made inquiries in every other quarter.”

“Your suspicions are turned toward the palace ?”

“Yes ; they have been from the first,” said Michael ; “but I dared not go there ; not that I feared for myself ; but I dared not yet awaken the duke to the fact that my master was missing.”

“I understand you,” returned Gaspard, “and I will myself see that immediate inquiry is made. I have friends in the city who will assist me. I think you do not doubt me ?”

“No,” returned Michael, promptly. “I believe you are what you say ; because I know, now that my memory serves me, that you are attached to the person of Theodore of Hartburg ; and I know that Theodore is my master’s friend. And so, sir, I shall trust you ; and there is full confidence between us.”

“Thank you,” said Gaspard. “And,” he added,



“as a first confession in that confidence, I will tell you that I am not so much here to help Vendorme, as to give information to my master touching any harm that may befall him. And now I will away to make search for intelligence at the ducal palace; and, as soon as possible, I will report to you.”

When Gaspard had gone, Michael and Cinthia sat down and talked matters over. They had much to say of Orlando's disappearance; and they had also much to say of the visit of Gaspard of Saxony. There was something curious—very curious—Cinthia thought, in it. She could not understand it. It filled her mind with imaginings of the marvellous and mysterious.

“It is all very plain to me,” said Michael,—“just as plain as the nose upon my face.”

“Perhaps you'll explain, then,” suggested the wife.

“Of course I will;” and the husband prepared to illustrate with his fingers. “Now look. In the first place, this Theodore is Count of Hartburg, and I suppose he is a very wealthy young man.”

“He is only a boy,” interposed Cinthia.

“A boy in years,” replied Michael, “but a man in understanding and authority. He was on the road, and was attacked by robbers; and he would certainly have been overcome—he and his party—but for the timely assistance of Vendorme. And so did Theodore have cause for deepest gratitude. Next—when the young count discovers the marvellous properties of the mail which his deliverer wears, he wants a garment of light material. Of course it



must be made in Milan, and Vendorme must make it. But Vendorme is banished. How can the difficulty be met? Very easily. Through Theodore's means our master is knighted, and thus, by the laws of chivalry, the gates of Milan are open to him; and he can now gain entrance to his shop. But there is trouble still. Manfred and Ludovico are enemies to Vendorme, and may seek to do him harm. Theodore knows this; and, since the knightly armorer is at work for him, he feels in duty bound to look after his welfare. Do you understand it now?"

"It is reasonable, as you have explained it, Michael; and yet it is strange."

"Of course it is strange. A great many things are strange; but I have full confidence in Gaspard. His very face is a sufficient passport."

Cinthia had no further argument to make; and when she had given her husband to understand that she coincided with him, she turned to the performance of her household duties.

Just in the edge of the evening Gaspard came back, and there was a deep cloud upon his face

"You have not found him?" said Cinthia.

"I have not," was the reply.

"Have you been to the palace?" asked Michael.

"Let me tell you," returned Gaspard, drawing a chair near to the armorer and his wife, and sitting down. "For me to have gone directly to the palace would have amounted to nothing. Marco Torquedo, a knight of Modena, one of the grand officers of the order of the silver cross, and one who



was present when Vendorme was exalted, was in this city, and to him I went. He, as in duty bound, proceeded at once to the palace, and made all possible inquiries ; but he could learn nothing concerning our missing friend. The duke acknowledged that circumstances might point him out as one who had a desire to put the young knight away ; and so, of his own accord, he took the most solemn oath that man can take that he had not harmed a hair of Vendorme's head—that he had not caused the same to be done—and that he did not know that harm had come to him. He furthermore offered the services of his guard to search for the missing, and gave Torquedo the freedom of the city for that purpose. I cannot think that Manfred has had any hand in taking our friend away."

"But how is it with the prince?" suggested Michael.

"Ludovico was, if possible, more earnest in his disavowal than was his father. He acknowledged that he hated Vendorme, and that he should be glad to know that the upstart was out of his way ; but thus far he had done nothing towards bringing about such a result."

"Then what can have happened?" cried Michael.

"I think," replied Gaspard, "that Vendorme must have left the city. He has other enemies besides the duke. The robbers of the Saveso are his enemies."

"I know, I know," muttered the armoror, with his hands working nervously together. "I know that the robber knights have a grudge against him ;



but I have not yet turned my thoughts that way. If harm has come to my master, I fear that the Duke of Milan hath had some hand in it."

"How !" returned Gaspard. "Would you not take such an oath in evidence ?"

"Ah, Manfred is a cold-blooded, heartless villain, and I know not how much his oath is worth. But I will wait—I may hear something more. To-morrow we will search again. You can leave the city, if you wish, but I shall remain within the walls ; for I do not believe that Orlando has gone out."

The Saxon looked earnestly into Michael's face, and after a little thought, he said :

"It may be as you surmise. Manfred may have taken a false oath. If he has, I pity him !"

"Ha—is there then some—"

"Hush. I have no explanation to make. If Manfred has harmed the missing knight, and the truth can ever be known, then God have mercy upon him !"

With this Gaspard arose, and began to pace the floor, while Cinthia set about preparing supper.

And now, leaving Michael and the Saxon to search as they please, we will look in at the palace, and see how matters are working there. After Marco Torquedo had gone, the duke felt greatly relieved, for he believed that all suspicion had been turned away from himself.

"You see," he said to his son, "that I was right. It is well that we did not harm the dog."

"Aye," replied Ludovico. "I see. It is well. I think Orlando Vendorme is safely disposed of ; and



now for my marriage. When am I to be master of Bergamo?"

"It shall be very soon, my son. And here again, let me tell you—I have done a wise thing. I have sent a messenger to the Pope, at Rome, and have received from the Pontiff his written orders that the hand of Rosabel of Bergamo be bestowed upon yourself. Thus, my son, there can be no opposition; and if the people of Bergamo should object, the Pope's mandate must silence them."

"You have done well. Now the fair heiress of Bergamo is mine beyond dispute. You say you have the Pope's permission already?"

"Yes, with his benediction upon the union."

"Then why should we wait?"

"We will not wait," replied the duke. "On the day after to-morrow the marriage shall take place."

"It is well," said Ludovico, pressing his hands together, and curling his lips with a demoniac expression. "Rosabel will be my wife while her outcast paramour is dying. I wish she could know it!"

"Ah, my son—beware! Do not let your feelings of vengeance run away with your discretion."

"Fear not," said the prince. "I am not so foolish as that. I think I have vengeance enough already—vengeance enough upon Vendorme; and as for the princess, I hope that she will not give me more cause for hating her."

"She will be yours, my son, and Bergamo will also be yours. The latter will be worth keeping. As to the former, you will keep her if you please!"



Ludovico understood his father's meaning, and the fiendish expression with which he answered showed that the hint was not foreign to his own thoughts.

"I have a firm friend in the pope," pursued Manfred ; "and as soon as I can turn my attention that way I shall join him in his effort to throw off the German yoke. I tell you our pontiff of Rome must have more power. There is no reason why he should be forced to bow at the nod of a temporal prince."

On the evening of the day following this interview, the duke sought the apartment of Rosabel, whom he found alone. He closed the door behind him, and having assured himself that no attendants were present, he opened his business :

"My Lady of Bergamo," he said, taking a seat near her, "I have come to inform you of the arrangements which have been made for your marriage. The ceremony will be performed to-morrow."

"My lord duke," returned the maiden, turning deathly pale, and trembling like an aspen, "this must not be. I cannot wed with your son."

"Your opposition will only make it worse for you, my child ; for the thing is fixed."

"No, no," cried Rosabel ; "you have not the right. You are my guardian ; but you have not the power to force me into such an alliance. If you persist—if you force the bond upon me—I will appeal to his holiness of Rome."

"Ah, my fair one, I am ahead of you there. I have seen the Pope—or, my messenger has seen him—and I have his authority for the marriage. In short, he orders that it shall so be."



“O—it is not so!”

“Here is the instrument, if you wish to see it.” And as Manfred thus spoke he drew the parchment from his bosom.

Rosabel took it in her hand, and ran her eye over the words that were written. It was a decree from the Pope, giving her in marriage to the prince Ludovico. What escape could there be from this? By the laws of the land all female orphans of patrician blood were under the spiritual care of the Pope; and his authority in matters of matrimonial alliance was final. Rosabel knew this, and when she had read the fatal decree, the parchment fell from her grasp and she clasped her hands in eager supplication.

“My lord,” she said, “if you seek the Castle of Bergamo for your son, take it. Take all I have of wealth—take my lands and my titles, and let me go free. O, you cannot wish to bring upon me a suffering so great. Give me my liberty, and all the rest is yours!”

“You are wild, my child; and you sadly misapprehend the intent of my son. He seeks your hand as much for your charms of person, as for the wealth of your estates.”

“No, no, it cannot be. Ludovico cannot want a wife who will not love him.”

“Hush, lady. You are speaking too much. You are not wise thus to let your tongue run loose. Since first you came to Milan it has been established that you should be Ludovico’s wife. It is an affair of taste, and your wishes in the matter must give way to imperious necessity. I see your intent, and I



know your meaning; and I may inform you now that further opposition will not be tolerated. I need not tell over to you the list of evil things you have already done; but I will tell you that we can put up with no more. Thus far we have borne your insults without bringing upon you the punishment richly deserved, but we have borne all. In the time to come you will oppose just authority at your peril. On the morrow you will give Ludovico your hand. I wish to hear no more now."

Thus speaking, the duke arose and left the apartment; and when the princess was alone, she sank down upon her knees, and buried her face in her hands. What escape could there be from this? She had expected it—she had awaited the blow for a long time; but she had not gained strength to bear up under the terrible affliction.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### AN ANGEL!

The evening wore on, and at an appointed hour, Rosabel's attendants came to assist her in undressing; but she did not wish their presence. She wished to be alone. She said she would call them when she wanted them.

And what direction were the thoughts of the



princess taking, as she sat there alone, with her hands clasped upon her bosom, and her eyes fixed upon the floor? Listen. She speaks her thoughts aloud :

“ O, it came like a bright vision across my path, and was quickly swallowed up in darkness. If it be a sin to love one below me in station, then I am a sinner, and I cannot repent. Oh, sweet youth, why has fate been so cruel? Noble, brave, and generous—thou art worthy the love of a queen. Orlando, Orlando, where art thou? O, were it not for these cruel locks that are placed upon my passage, I would seek thee, even though death stood in the way! But, alas! I am doomed. Ah, thou wilt never know how Rosabel of Bergamo loved thee. In the years to come, some other fair one will rest upon thy bosom; and while thou blessest her, thou wilt forget Rosabel. And where will Rosabel be? O, merciful heaven, save me from the cruel fate!”

She bowed her head, and groaned in agony. The thought of Ludovico was appalling, and she shrank from it in terror. Quivering at every joint, she arose and went to her dressing-case, and took therefrom a small dagger. Orlando Vendorme made that dagger, and gave it to her. She kissed it in memory of the giver, and then leaned against the wall, with her hand upon her brow. Where were her thoughts now? Why does she look upon the sharp blade so eagerly, and clutch the jeweled hilt with such nervousness? Why does she move her left hand



so strangely over her bosom? Why does she pull away the silk and the lace, and lay bare the pearly skin that rises and falls over her throbbing heart? Does she think of gaining freedom thus from the dreadful embrace of Ludovico? Hark! What is that sound? A knock upon the door. Quick as thought the princess hides her dagger, and then bids the applicant enter.

The door was opened, and a female, muffled in a dark mantle, came in. As she closed the door behind her she let the mantle fall from her head, thus exposing the face of a bright-eyed, fair-featured girl, of near Rosabel's own age.

"How," cried the princess, starting back; "is this Hippolita?"

"It is my name."

"The minion of Hugh de Castro?"

"A child of misfortune, noble lady," replied the visitor, in a low, sad tone. "Blame me if you will—blame me all the earth—but, O, I think Heaven hath some pity!"

"Pardon, pardon, Hippolita," exclaimed Rosabel, advancing quickly and extending her hand. "I blame no one for misfortune, for, alas! I am the most unfortunate being alive. Now sit thee down, and tell me why thou art here."

"We must be alone," said the girl, casting her eyes over the room.

"We are alone."

"But we must not be overheard; for what I have to say no other mortal ear must hear."

"You may speak freely, and without fear."



“Then, lady,” continued Hippolita, drawing her stool nearer to the princess, and speaking in a low tone, “listen to my story, and do not upbraid me until you have heard me through. Five nights ago my master came to me, and wished me to do him a service. His will had been my law for so long that I thought not of refusing; and when he offered me a great reward, I told him I would do anything he asked. He showed me a purse of gold, and a necklace of diamonds, and promised me, when my work was done, that these should be mine. I then felt that I could do anything for him, and I swore that he might trust me. He placed this mantle upon my shoulders, and led me to the palace; and when we had reached the porch beneath the old tower, he took a torch and conducted me down to the lowest, deepest, darkest dungeon. It was a long, dreary passage, and he told me I must learn to tread it without a light; and to that end he led me to and fro until I could grope my way from the porch to the pit in the darkness. Then he told me that there was a certain person in Milan whom I was to lead to that dungeon. He dared not send officers to arrest him, but he must be taken to his prison so secretly that no soul should know it save those engaged in the work. I told my master I would do it if I could. He said I could do it very easily if I did it properly. The man to be imprisoned was Orlando Vendorme—Hold, lady. Hear me to the end. I was instructed how to do my work, even to the very words I was to speak; and then I entered upon the task. That night I hid myself near the armorer’s



shop, but I found no opportunity to speak with Vendorme alone. On the following night I went again, but with no better success. On the third night, however, I gained the opportunity I sought. Through a small window I saw that the youth was at work alone, and I went and rapped upon the door. He admitted me, and after gaining from him a pledge of secrecy, I delivered the errand with which I had been charged—the false, lying errand which was to lead him to his doom. I told him that I came from the Princess Rosabel, and that she sought his help. He grasped at the prospect, and said that mortal danger should not deter him from any effort the good of the princess might require. Then I told him that Rosabel wished to escape the hated bondage with which she was threatened by union with Ludovico, and that she looked to him for aid. He clasped his hands, and swore that he would give up his life for the good of the princess if need be. Hold, lady—”

“No, no,” cried Rosabel, pale and quivering, “I cannot hold my peace! O, how could you do it?”

“But, dear lady, will you listen? Wait till I have told you all, and your thoughts shall be turned into another channel.”

“Go on, go on,—O, what perfidy! Speak quickly, and ease my bursting heart if you can!”

“I told Vendorme that I had been commissioned to conduct him to the princess, and he followed me with eagerness. I led him to the palace—led him to the porch beneath the old tower—and led him into the dark passage. The way had been prepared,



so there were no obstructions. I groped along the gloomy course—down the slimy steps—into the very bowels of the earth—and finally reached the lowest dungeon, where the man was to be shut up. O, lady, if you think I was heartless—if you think I did this willingly—you are mistaken. When I had heard the youth speak—when he breathed forth such devotion to one of my sex—when I saw his noble, handsome face, and remembered his gallant conduct—I felt my resolution grow weak. But I had promised to do it, and I dared not disobey. But when I had led him to that deep dungeon, where the air was chill and damp, and where, perhaps, he was to find a grave, my heart sank within me, and I grew faint and dizzy. Had I then been mistress of my own actions, I should have turned back; but my master was close at hand. Vendorme asked me why I trembled so, but I evaded the question by telling him a falsehood. I left him there, telling him that I was going to seek the princess, and in a moment more the solid iron door was shut upon him!

“The rest of that night I could not sleep a wink; and all day yesterday, and all last night, and all day to-day, I have been suffering more than I can tell. This afternoon Ludovico came to see my master, and I heard them talking of the marriage which, they said, was to come off to-morrow. By and by they mentioned the name of Orlando Vendorme, and I crept nearer to listen. What I then heard froze my blood with horror! No, no, lady—hold! It is not so bad, listen,”



Hippolita caught the hand of the princess, and begged her to sustain herself.

"If you love the noble young knight, and would save him, you have need of all your strength ; so faint not yet."

"Save him ! Save him !" cried Rosabel, starting forward and seizing Hippolita by the arm. "Can I ? can I ?"

"Listen, lady. I told you I heard them speak of Orlando Vendorme. O, it was horrible ; but it may not yet be too late. He is shut up in that deep, dark, damp, cold dungeon ; and there he is doomed to die, without food, and without drink ! This is the third night, and he has had no succor yet. I heard Ludovico say that he would marry the princess while Vendorme was struggling with the last touch of death !"

With a groan so deep and agonizing that even the dumb walls seemed startled by its intensity, the princess clasped her hands upon her brow, and fixed a wild, staring look upon the visitor.

"One moment," struggled Hippolita, putting out her hands, "I will quickly finish. When I heard this terrible speech I resolved that, if the thing were necessary, my life should be given to the undoing of the wrong I had done. I have obtained the keys of all the doors between us and the fearful dungeon, except those which belong to your own apartments, and I have come to you, believing that you would help me in the work of salvation. If you can unlock the way to the passage that communicates with the rear porch, I can do the rest. My master had the



key to the dungeon, and I know where to find it. O, lady, can you help me? I would have gone alone, and set the prisoner free, but if he escapes he must come this way. He cannot pass the guard in the rear court."

Rosabel moved forward a step, and caught the messenger by the hand.

"Hippolita," she said, in a quick, sharp whisper, "can I trust you?"

"Dear lady," returned the bond-woman, "I am trusting you with my life."

"But," pursued the princess, tightening her grasp, and quivering at every joint, "if I should flee—if success attends us, and I should flee with the knight—should flee from the horrible fate the tyrant of Milan has in store for me—would you be true to me then?"

"Ere I answer you I have a favor to ask," replied Hippolita, sinking down upon her knees. "Let me go with you, and I will be as true to you as the sun is true to the day, and I will lay down my life for you if necessary."

"So shall it be," said Rosabel, lifting the girl to her feet. "And now," she added, still tremulous with excitement, "let us hasten upon our mission. O, there is no time to be lost. Every moment may be as precious as a life."

"We must take some cordial with us," suggested Hippolita, who had been considering upon the steps necessary to be taken.

"Certainly," replied the princess. "And is there anything else?"



"I think of nothing."

Rosabel of Bergamo could not have taken a sister more completely into her confidence than she had taken the girl who now bore her company. The release of the prisoner was an object with them both ; but that was not all. If Rosabel wished to flee from the power of the duke, Hippolita was no less anxious to flee from the wrath of her master, so in this they had a common cause. When the princess had prepared herself for the mission, she turned and took her companion by the hand :

"Hippolita, henceforth our fates are cast together. If we save the knight I will forget and forgive the past, and thou shalt find a home with me while we both live."

"And I," replied the girl, with deep, sincere emotion, "will serve you most faithfully."

"Now let us go."

In the rear of the palace was a small garden, surrounded by a high wall, to which the princess had access at all times ; and in going thither it was necessary to enter the long passage through which the knight had been conducted. Rosabel had the keys of the doors that lay between her apartment and the garden, and when she had found them, the two adventurers started on their mission. With cautious steps they moved on, the princess going in advance with the keys, while Hippolita followed with a small lantern, which she could conceal beneath her mantle when she pleased. Thus they reached the vaulted passage, and here they exchanged positions, for now



Hippolita had the keys, and knew how to lead the way.

And how was it in the dungeon?

Cold, damp and drear! With the last effort of nature Vendorme struggled to his feet, and staggered against the wall. He pressed his swollen tongue upon the cold stone, but the sense of relief was gone. A little while he stood there, and then he reached once more for his sword. Twice he had found the point, and twice he had put it away, but hope was gone, and his poor life was going with it. He had placed the hilt upon the floor of his cell, and was trying to balance himself so as to aim the point at his heart, when his ear was struck by the sound of a hand upon the bars of his door. He listened a moment, and when he was assured that the door was being opened' he let his sword fall and started forward. But he had not the strength to support himself, and when he had staggered a few steps he sank down upon the hard, cold floor. He knew that the door was opened, and that the light was shining in upon him, and presently some one knelt by his side, and called his name.

What sound was that? What was it that thrilled this soul with such awakening power? What was it that sent such a throb to his heart, and startled his nerves to sense and feeling?

"ORLANDO! ORLANDO!"

He started up, and supported himself on his elbow.

"Who speaks to me?"

"Orlando! Orlando! O, can you not arise? Do



you not know me? I am come to save you! O, in Heaven's name, faint not yet! Support yourself yet awhile longer, and all may be well with us both! It is Rosabal who speaks!"

"Rosabel! Rosabel!" gasped the prisoner, putting forth his hands.

She guided them to her shoulders—she wound her own arms about him, and thus lifted him to a sitting posture.

"He is famishing for the want of drink," said Hippolita, who had just mustered strength enough to speak; for the sight of the terrible work she had helped to do had shocked her so that for awhile she had been faint and dizzy. But a sense of the necessity that was upon her, and the atonement she was to make, gave her new strength, and forthwith she applied herself to the assistance of the sufferer. She produced the wine she had brought with her, in a silver flask, and when the stopple had been removed she placed it to the knight's lips. Eagerly did he swallow the welcome draught, and as the warmth spread through his system, he felt new strength.

"More—more of the wine," he gasped, as the flask was removed from his lips.

"In a little while," returned the princess. "It may be dangerous to drink too much now."

"Ha! that voice! No, no—it is a dream!" And he swept his hand across his eyes.

"It is not a dream, Orlando. It is Rosabel. She is here to save you. O, can you not go with her?"

The youth gazed up, and when, finally, he saw



the sweet face of the angel, and could distinguish the soul-cherished features, he sank forward, with his head upon her bosom.

"It is," he murmured. "It is Rosabel. Am I to be taken hence?"

"Yes, I have come to take you. Can you walk?"

With an effort he rose to his feet, and as he did so his gaze rested upon Hippolita.

"Oh," he cried, as soon as he recognized her, "then you did not deceive me! You were not the cruel one I had feared. You did not bring me here, knowingly, to my death."

The poor girl knew not what to say, but Rosabel came quickly to her assistance:

"This girl, Orlando, has come with me to help you. She it was who informed me where you were, and to her I am indebted for this privilege."

"O, God be praised!" the sufferer ejaculated, fervently. "I had almost cursed her in the belief that she had brought me here to die. But she will forgive me for the thought. I have suffered enough. I am thirsty. May I not have more wine now?"

The flask was now given into his hands, and he drained it to the bottom. In a little while he was able to stand without assistance, and his step was safe. It was not the wine alone that had given him such invigoration. Far, far from it. As he turned and cast his eyes once more upon the princess, he falteringly said:

"If this is true—if you have come to save me—I will find the strength to support myself. Whither wilt thou lead me?"



"First," replied Rosabel, "we must lead you to a purer air than this. Let us find a better resting place, and then we will consider. You can lean upon me."

"Upon you, lady?"

"Yes—fear not—I am strong enough. Hippolita shall go on in advance, and we will follow."

"Upon you! And not a dream! O, my soul!"

And she took his arm and led him forth from the dreadful dungeon—led him up from those noisome depths—led him as something tender and precious in the sight of her love.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### WHITHER NOW?

The trembling, anxious party reached the apartments of the princess without meeting opposition; and when once there several questions arose. First,—how fared it with the knight,—could he sustain himself through further trial? He was very weak, and the last ascent had been made with the utmost difficulty; but he said he only needed nourishment. Rosabel quickly brought him food and drink, the very sight of which seemed to give him vigor. And while he was eating, the second question arose: How could they leave the palace?

"I think," said Hippolita, "that I can open a way.



I have with me all my master's keys ; and I know that he has a private entrance to the palace."

"Certainly he has," returned the princess.

"Yes," pursued the other, "for I have come in with him. If I were in the audience-chamber, I could easily find my way out."

"Then," cried Rosabel, in a tone of relief, "all may be well. I cannot reach the audience-chamber ; but I can gain access to the passage which must be threaded in passing out thence by de Castro's private way, as it crosses the path to my bath."

As soon as this point was settled, Rosabel betook herself to her closet, where she collected her valuable jewels, together with quite a sum of money, and also took a mantle of sufficient size to cover her head and shoulders. When she returned to the chamber, she found that Vendorme had so far recovered that he was able to walk to and fro without difficulty.

The nourishment he had taken, and the invigoration of the generous wine, had given tone to his strength, while the thought of escape started the circulation in his system, sending vigor to every part. He had taken his sword, which Hippolita had brought from the dungeon, and as he let it fall into its scabbard, he said to the princess:

"Now, fair lady, I am strong enough to proceed. If I might judge from your preparation, you mean to accompany me?"

"Yes, sir," replied Rosabel. She hesitated a moment, and then added—"But before I move let me undeceive you upon one point. I did not draw you into the danger from which you are now trying



to escape. I had no hand or part in bringing you to the palace. The message which drew you hither was false. I did not send it. Your deadly enemies framed it, and obtained its conveyance. If there are further explanations to be made, I can make them at some future time, if I have opportunity. I have told this to you so that you should not imagine that I led you into such great danger."

"Hold a moment, lady," said the knight, putting forth his hand as though he would warn her back ; "if you did not, after all, seek for my presence, let us part here. You must not place yourself in further peril for me. I would rather die where I am than owe my life to your misery."

"You misunderstand me, sir," said the princess, advancing, and placing her hand upon his arm. "I have as much to fear and dread beneath the roof of this palace as you have ; and so I have as much need to flee. Thus far let the matter be understood between us. And now, are you strong enough to proceed ?"

"Yes, lady."

With cautious steps Rosabel led the way from her chamber, and reached the passage, to which allusion had been made, without difficulty. It now became Hippolita's duty to lead, so she took the lantern and went ahead, while the princess walked by the side of the knight. She took his hand—took it as though she would assist him,—and the thought that he had been weak, and was leaning upon her for support, gave her strength and power. His hand trembled



as it rested in her grasp, and she asked him if he would bear more weight upon her.

"I am strong enough," she said; "and you tremble as though you were weak. Lean upon me."

"Strong! Weak!—Lean upon you?" repeated Vendorme, gazing down upon the lovely face which was but dimly revealed by the struggling beams from Hippolita's lantern. "Ah, lady, I am not weak now. I am stronger than you think. Were the tyrant to meet us at this moment I believe my sword would fly from its scabbard as quickly as ever; and this arm should wield it, too. If I trembled, it was not from weakness."

Rosabel bowed her head, and spoke no more; but she did not yet let go the hand she held.

Meanwhile, Hippolita led the way in safety, opening the doors as they interposed, and being careful to close them behind her, until she reached the outer door of all, which opened into a side court, where a sentinel was generally posted. Here she stopped, and conferred with the princess.

"If we can pass from this door," she said, "we are free from the palace. It opens into a small court, where there is a large gate and a wicket, and to the wicket I have a key. Sometimes there is a sentinel posted here."

"But not always?" said Rosabel, interrogatively.

"I believe he is very seldom absent. Hark!" And thus speaking, Hippolita put her ear to the door and listened.

"Yes," she added, "he is here. I can hear his step very plainly."



"What now?" cried the princess, in alarm. "Must we give up after gaining thus much?"

"Wait," said Vendorme, moving a step nearer to the door, and drawing himself up as though he would try his muscles. "This is the court on the side of the Olona?"

"Yes," replied Hippolita.

"And you have the key to the wicket?"

"Yes."

"Then our course is clear. Do you open the door, and let me pass out first. I will meet the guard, and find some way to overcome him. Fear not, lady—I know what I do."

"But—sir—you are weak," urged Rosabel.

"Upon my life, lady—aye, upon more than that—upon my responsibility for your safety—I know what I do. Let us waste no time. There is but a single sentinel, and he must be passed. Let your attendant conceal her lantern, and open the door; and do you remain behind until I bid you come."

Rosabel gave her consent, and the door was opened. Our hero drew his sword, and stepped forth into the open air, meeting the sentinel but a few feet distant. The stars were shining brightly, and the knight saw clearly the work that lay before him. The guardsman was an ordinary-sized fellow, armed with a spear, who, when he beheld a man advancing from the open door, demanded to know who came there.

"Who should come this way but one who has the right?" returned our hero. "Listen, fellow, for I have a word to say to thee."



Now in all probability that sentinel had never seen a man come from that door who had no business to pass ; so thinking of no harm, he rested the pole of his lance upon the pavement, and listened to what was to be said.

“Do you know me?” asked the youth, taking a step forward.

“Eh !” uttered the soldier, staring into the questioner’s face. “Why, it is the knight of the Silver Cross ! It is Vendorme ! Bless me, sir, where did you come from ? There has been a great noise about you.”

Orlando was very sure that none of the guard had been entrusted with the secret of his imprisonment, so he ventured boldly upon his reply :

“I came into the palace by one way, and I am going out by another ; but I am not alone. I have two companions with me. We have come from a distant apartment, and every door is locked behind us, leaving no trace of our passage. This door we will also lock, so that, when we are gone, you alone will know how we went. I tell you this so that you may be prepared to shield yourself should you be questioned touching your knowledge of our departure. You know me, and you know what my pledge is worth.”

As our hero thus spoke he grasped the fellow’s spear, and wrenched it from him, at the same time raising the point of his sword.

“Beware ! You are safe if you obey me. Not a soul in the palace will know how I have gone if you hold your peace. I am fleeing for my life, and you



should know how to hold me. Stand back and let my companions pass, and all shall be well ; but, if you give one note of alarm, it shall be your last note of life !”

It was very easy to see that the guardsman had no thought of entering into a physical conflict with the knight who had overcome all opponents in the list, and who had also slain the giant Matteo in a hand-to-hand encounter. The very presence of the redoubtable champion overcame him with awe. Still he had an idea to his own safety.

“You cannot pass further,” he said, without any effort to regain his spear. “The gate is locked, and the captain has the key.”

“We have the key to the wicket,” returned Vendorme, “and can easily make our way out. Now answer me—shall we pass?”

“You will not betray me?”

“Of course not. I tell you once again, we have left no trace behind us, and it can never be known which way we came, unless you confess it. Come—speak.”

“Give me back my spear, and go.”

“I will give it to you when we have passed the wicket. But, remember this : If you give an alarm, be it so much as a sigh, my passage shall be over your dead body. And yet I would not harm you if I can help it. Come—we have no time to spare.”

The sentinel moved back against the wall, and folded his arms upon his breast.

“I trust in your knightly word,” he said, “that



you will give me back my spear before you leave me."

"You shall have it."

And when he had thus spoken Vendorme turned to the door, and bade his companions come forth. They came, so closely muffled in their mantles that their features could not be seen, and Hippolita advanced directly to the wicket and unlocked it. She passed out first, and when Rosabel had gone, Orlando placed the spear against the wall and followed them, the sentinel making no movement to oppose them. When the wicket had been relocked the party stood in a narrow street, with no present bar to their progress.

Whither now?

"I must get some sign of intelligence to Michael Totilla," said Orlando; "and furthermore, I must find some bit of rest. I am glad the guardsman did not try my arm, for I much fear that my strength would have failed me in the event. Still, lady, I am at your service."

"Let me speak," interposed Hippolita; and she presented her claim to be heard the more readily because she saw that neither the knight nor the princess were calm enough for deep reason. "Of one thing we may be sure: Our flight cannot be known till morning; so we have some hours yet of security before us. I must return to my master's house, and carry back these keys; and in the meantime you can proceed to the armorer's shop, where I will meet you. I think the keys had better be returned; and I know that I can do it without danger. In less



than half an hour we will all be at the armorer's where we shall have Michael to assist us."

As no better plan than this could be thought of, Orlando and Rosabel at once agreed to it, and so the parties proceeded in their respective courses.

"We must not remain long at the armorer's," said the princess, as she and her companion walked on.

"We will not," returned Vendorme. "Do not fear on my account, lady. I am not so weak, even now, as I was a short time since. The excitement of the moment, when I met the guard, made a heavy draft upon my strength of nerve. If you wish to leave Milan, be sure I am able to go with you."

"We must be clear of Milan before daylight," said Rosabel. "Oh, I should dread the consequences of being within these walls on the morrow."

"We will not be here. We both have reason to flee from the tyrant's cruel wrath."

When they reached the armorer's house Orlando knocked upon the door, and ere long the voice of Michael was heard within, demanding who was there. The applicant had but to speak, and in a moment more the door was thrown open, and his hand was grasped by the honest armorer.

"My eyes and ears do not deceive me!" Michael cried, holding his young master in a close embrace.

"No, my good Michael; I am here safe and sound, though somewhat weak; and I have a companion, too, who claims your assistance."

"Welcome, all friends of Vendorme, to all that Michael Totilla has. And now come to our board."

When they reached the dwelling-room they found



Cinthia already there, she having arisen at the first alarm ; and when she had embraced Orlando, she turned to his companion, who had not yet thrown the mantle from her head.

“ Lady, thou art welcome. How ! The princess ? ”

“ Yes, good wife,” replied the fugitive, letting her mantle fall. “ Rosabel of Bergamo seeks your friendship and your aid.”

Cinthia was considerably startled by this discovery ; but she quickly regained her composure, and gave to the princess a cheerful promise of love and fidelity.

“ Ha,” cried Michael, “ here is another friend. Perhaps you recognize him, my master ? ”

Orlando turned as he heard a door open behind him, and beheld a man approaching.

“ I think I should know that face,” he said. “ Yes, yes,—it is our esquire of Saxony—good Gaspard. Am I not right ? ”

“ Of a verity you are,” replied Gaspard, extending his hand. “ Saint Andrew ! how strange it is ! The bird returns as we were about to sit down in despair.”

“ Gaspard has been helping me in my search after you,” explained Michael. “ Ha ! there is another knock at the door ! ”

“ Be not alarmed,” said Orlando, as he noticed that Cinthia started and turned pale. “ I think it is a friend—one who led this lady and myself in safety from prison.”

It was Hippolita who demanded admittance ; and when she had been seated with the rest, Orlando



commenced the explanation which was anxiously waited for. He told his own story—how he had been led away by the false errand—(he did not yet know that Hippolita had acted against him knowingly)—how he had been cast into the dungeon—how the prince had come to him, and revealed to him the horrible fate to which he had been doomed—how he had suffered almost unto death—and how, at the last moment, the saving angel came and set him free.

During this recital Cinthia trembled and paled with horror, while Michael and Gaspard clenched their hands and ground their teeth.

“As for the princess,” pursued our hero, after he had answered several questions from Gaspard, “she can tell you what she pleases.”

“I have little to tell,” said Rosabel ; “and, if I had, time would not permit the recital. It is enough that I hope to escape from a doom worse to me than death. I think you understand me.”

They did understand her ; and they showed no disposition to trouble her with questions. She simply added, by way of doing justice to her attendant, that to Hippolita both she and the knight owed their escape from the palace.

And now the question was—how should the fugitives get out from the city ? Orlando felt strong enough to move on, and he believed that the fresh air of the country would help to invigorate him.

“It is all very simple,” said Gaspard. “If you do not object I shall bear you company for a while ; that is, if you turn your steps to the north.”



"I mean to go that way," replied Vendorme, "and I shall accept your company thankfully."

"Then there will be no trouble. I have a right to pass from the city at any time, with my attendants, and the guard, if they have had no especial orders to the contrary, will not question me."

Michael was anxious to accompany his master ; but his proposition was quickly ruled down, and he finally consented to remain behind ; and as soon as this understanding had been arrived at, he started out with Gaspard to procure horses. Orlando had two horses in a neighboring stall, which Michael obtained, while the Saxon soon brought two of his own. The animals were led into the court, where the party were presently in the saddle.

"I shall hear from you," said Michael, holding his master by the hand. "You will find some way to let me know of your fate?"

"Fear not, my good friend," replied our hero. "While I live I will not forget you."

He then kissed Cinthia's hand, and when the latter had bade an affectionate adieu to Rosabel and Hippolita, the party rode out from the yard. At the gate of the Saveso the guard wished to know who passed at that hour.

"Gaspard of Saxony and his friends !" was the reply.

And the reply was accepted, and the party allowed to pass without further question.

"How many hours to sunrise?" asked Orlando, when they had cleared the city.

"Not more than three," replied Gaspard.



"Then we have need of haste."

"Do you fear?"

"Fear!—I? No, sir—not beyond the walls of Milan. But—for this fair lady—I would—"

"I understand," said the Saxon.

"O," cried Rosabel, as she grasped and tightened her rein, "let me ride on even unto death, rather than be taken back to Milan!"

"Then on we go!" said Gaspard. "I will lead the way until the sun is up."

The horses opened into a striding gallop, and the party sped swiftly on away from the sleeping city.

And whither did they go? What should be the end?

Orlando Vendorme asked himself these questions as he gazed upon the face of the beautiful being who rode beside him, but he knew not what to answer. A strange thought—almost a hope—came tremblingly up from his heart, but he dared not give it place in his reason.

He would save Rosabel of Bergamo if he could. Why need he think further?





## CHAPTER XIII.

### NEED OF REST.

The duke of Milan was astir earlier than usual, and by eight o'clock the prince and Hugh de Castro were with him in his closet.

"This day," cried Ludovico, "shall see me amply avenged. Upon Rosabel of Bergamo I shall lay my hand with authority ; and upon that dog of an out-cast I will see the seal of death fixed !"

"Aye," responded the duke, "we can have no further trouble. I did fear somewhat that the princess might so far oppose us as to have recourse to her single right of refusing a husband. This would have been a difficult matter for us ; but the edict of his holiness has removed that obstacle, and this lady's consent is not material. But we will not have a large assembly at the marriage ceremony. Only those whom we can trust shall be there. On the morrow the marriage shall be published, and celebrated throughout the city."

"How is the maiden ?" asked de Castro.

"As stubborn as ever," replied the duke.

"Not a very pleasant wife," the captain remarked, turning upon the prince a light smile.



"It makes little difference to me," said Ludovico, with an ugly twist of the mouth. "I become master of the castle of Bergamo ; and, if my wit does not leave me, I'll show the lady Rosabel that I can master a refractory woman."

"I pity her, if she forces you to the test," returned de Castro, with a significant nod.

"So do I," rejoined the prince. "Still," he added, with considerable self-assurance, "I do not fancy that she will put me to much trouble. Her proud spirit will soon break down when she finds that every turn will only draw more tightly the bonds of her own suffering.

"If her spirit doesn't break," suggested Manfred, with one of his fiendish leers, "let her keep the strain up till her heart breaks. It will be as well in the end."

Hugh de Castro, villain as he was, could not hear this without a shudder. He joined freely in the crusade against Vendorme, for the youthful knight had wounded his pride ; but he had no heart for exulting in the misery of the beautiful princess. Still he was willing to lend his aid to the accomplishment of the marriage, because whatever added to the power of the prince enhanced the value of his own station.

"And now," said Ludovico, "when shall the ceremony take place?"

"It shall be as soon as the hour of audience is passed," replied the duke.

"Good." Then turning to the captain the prince asked—"Have you the keys to the dungeon?"

"Yes, my lord, I brought them with me."



"Then I will go down and see if Vendorme is dead. I would like to know."

"I had thought of that very thing myself," said the duke. "Do you go and visit the dungeon, and in the meantime I will send a messenger to the princess."

Ludovico took the keys from de Castro, and when he had gone the duke sent his page to inform Rosabel that he would be with her as soon as he had given audience to his officers.

The audience on that day was short, and when Manfred returned to his closet he found his page waiting for him.

"Will the princess be ready?"

"The princess is not in her apartments, my lord."

"Ha—where is she?"

"She is not to be found. Her attendants have searched everywhere, but without discovering the least trace of her."

"She has not left the palace?"

"It is feared so, my lord. Her jewels are gone; and moreover, her bed was not pressed during the night."

"It cannot be!" cried Manfred. "She could not have escaped from the palace. If she is not in her own apartments, she must be concealed somewhere in the adjacent passes. Oho—she cannot escape so easily. She is lurking in some dark corner. Ha—here comes the prince."

"Aye," exclaimed Ludovico, quivering from head to foot, as he strode in and stood before his father,



"it is the prince, in a cloud ! Let your page withdraw."

The boy left the apartment, and the duke then turned towards his son, with an explanatory gesture.

"I know what you mean, Ludovico ; but it will not avail. I have heard of her absence."

"Of *her* absence ! Of whom do you speak ?"

"Why—of the princess, to be sure."

"Is *she* gone ?"

"She is missing from her chamber."

"O, holy angels guard us !" ejaculated the prince, wringing his hands as though he knew not what else to do. "I spoke not of the princess—I had heard nothing of her. I have been to the deep, dark dungeon, where our old enemies died, and where we left Orlando Vendorme."

"And did you find him dead ?"

"Dead ? No ! I found him not at all ! The place was empty. Not even a rat was there to show me signs of life !"

"Holy Saints ! No, no, Ludovico. You trifle with me !"

"Trifle with you ! I am not in a mood for trifling ! Vendorme is gone !"

"Merciful heavens !" gasped the duke, "and Rosabel is gone, too ! Are we both crazy ! Are we blind ! Do our senses play us false ! No, no,—Vendorme could not have escaped. He could not force those ponderous doors."

"Not a door had been forced," returned the



prince, "nor had a lock been harmed. I found every bolt in its place, and every door fast."

"Then some evil spirit is in arms against us! Ha—here comes my captain. How now, de Castro? You look troubled. What have you found amiss?"

"Only this, my lord," replied de Castro, closing the door behind him, and advancing into the room—"I think my fair minion, she who conveyed Vendorme to the dungeon, hath taken a sudden leave of me."

"What—was it Hippolita?"

"Yes."

"And is she gone?"

"I think so."

"When? When?"

"Sometime in the night."

"Then," cried the duke, "I think we begin to have light. Were the keys of the passage leading to our dungeon where she could get them?"

"How, my lord? Has—"

"Don't stop to question me, but answer. Were those keys where she could get them?"

"Yes."

"Then, de Castro, your wench hath done more mischief than an army could have done. Our prisoner is gone from the dungeon, and Rosabel of Bergamo hath gone with him!"

De Castro stood like one upon whom had burst a thunderbolt."

"Gone!" he repeated, trembling when he spoke.

"The outcast gone!"



"Aye—and the princess, too," returned the duke, his tones mingling with the grating of his teeth. "De Castro, if you do not find the runaways, I'll hold you accountable! I thought you could trust your wench."

"So I thought, my lord. Indeed, I did the best I could. Hippolita never deceived me before. But—but—"

"Well—but what!"

"But, my lord, this work must have been too much for her. Her weak, foolish heart was not proof against sympathy for the gallant knight."

"I think," said Ludovico, coming forward as he spoke, "that we had better cease our arguments, and start in pursuit. I am well convinced that de Castro hath done us no wrong willingly. If he has erred, let him make it good to us by finding that which is lost."

"I meant no accusation against our captain," said the duke; "and yet I have reason for offence. However, let us find the fugitives first, and then we may look into the other matters if we please. And de Castro, I shall not abate from my proposition. You must bring them back."

"I will do my best, my lord—be assured of that."

"The first look shall be made at the house of the armorer," said Ludovico. "We must have Michael Totilla upon the rack; for I am sure that Vendorme would not have left the city without communicating with him."

De Castro shook his head.

"We must not trouble the armorer at present



We cannot approach him without committing ourselves; and we are not prepared to do that. If we seek him and make inquiries touching Vendorme, we but expose our part against the knight."

"The captain is right," said Manfred. "For our own safety we must move cautiously. Master Totilla, if I know him at all, is not the man to give up his friend; so we should gain nothing from him. We'll leave him until another time, and make our first inquiries of the palace guard, and then question the sentinels at the city gates."

Ludovico saw the force of the reasoning, and he urged his point no further. If, upon thorough search, the fugitives were not to be found in the palace, he was willing that de Castro should continue the work as he pleased.

As it was very evident that the three missing ones had gone together, inquiry was only made for the princess and Hippolita; and very soon it was decided that they were not within the palace walls.

Where next? De Castro knew, if Hippolita had led the way with his keys, that she must have gone out by his own private passage; so he called upon the sentinels who had been posted in the side court during the night. One of those men trembled, and his tongue faltered, when he met the gaze of his chief. The captain believed he had found the delinquent, so he sent the others away, for the purpose of questioning this fellow alone.

"Hark ye, Bernardo," said de Castro, "I know what has transpired; and now if you will answer me truly, you shall be safe; but if you attempt to



deceive me, your head must fall. Did not some persons pass your post last night?"

The man trembled violently, but he could not escape the answer.

"Yes, sir," he replied, sinking upon his knees, "but I could not help it."

"Could not help it! What a thing of wood are you to be a soldier! Up, and answer me. Stand up,—I have promised you your life if you answer truly. How was it?"

"Thus it was," said the guardsman: "Sir Orlando Vendorme made his appearance from the palace; and as he came out so honestly, and was so famed a gentleman, I did not oppose him with force. By a wicked manœuver he got my spear away from me; and, with his dreadful sword at my bosom, dictated his own terms. He had two companions with him—two women—and he had the key to the wicket—and I let them pass out."

"Did you see the faces of those women?"

"No, sir. They were covered with their mantles."

"Bernardo, you should have died at your post rather than allow such a thing."

"I thought of that, sir; but my life was sweet, and the knight would have passed all the same."

"Well, well,—I have not time to upbraid you further, but I have an offer to make. These persons must be found, and you are to help in the work. Your success will decide what more shall be done for you. Not a word of this to any living soul; but hold yourself in readiness to answer my call."



The poor soldier was glad enough to get off upon any terms, and he promised that he would do all he could towards capturing the fugitive knight.

It was near noon when de Castro came to make his report to the duke.

"My lord," he said, "I have gained the clue ; and I find another party mixed up in the matter. At the gate of the Saveso, some two hours past midnight, Gaspard of Saxony passed out, accompanied by one man and two females. Of course these must have been our fugitives,"

"Gaspard of Saxony !" muttered the duke, with a nervous quiver of the lip. "I had my doubts of that fellow when he was here. What is he ? Who is he ?"

"He professes to be a servant of that young Count of Hartburg," replied de Castro.

"Yes—I know that ; but O, I wish I knew what is now hidden from me. Who, who is Theodore of Hartburg ?"

"Ah, my lord, you puzzle me beyond my power. But this is not the time for solving that question. It is very certain that Gaspard has gone off with our fugitives, and he must be found if possible. If we find his course, we shall find the course of the others."

"Right, de Castro. Into your hands I give the work. Bring back Rosabel of Bergamo ; bring back Orlando Vendorme ;—or, if you have the opportunity, kill him as you find him ; and as for your girl, you may do as you please."

"I shall be quickly on the road, my lord, with half



a score of my best men ; and if I do not fall behind my expectations, I shall bring the missing ones back to you."

\* \* \* \* \*

As the sun arose Gaspard and his party arrived within sight of a small village on the river Adda, distant some ten leagues from Milan. They had stopped upon the brow of a gentle eminence, where a soft breeze, laden with the balm of flower and shrubs, gave them sweet salute. Before them, and stretching away to the left, lay a billowy succession of fields and small vineyards, owned and cultivated by the inhabitants of the village ; while upon the right flowed the river, beyond which a spur of the Rhetian Alps reared aloft their rocky peaks.

"How is it ?" asked Gaspard, turning to our hero.

"If there is safe shelter here," replied Orlando, "I cannot go further now. I am very weak, and must have rest. Still, there must be no danger. Rather than run a serious risk, I would keep on till noon."

"No, no," said Rosabel, who had been watching the knight for some time, "you cannot keep on. It would be madness to think of it. It is a miracle that you have held your saddle so long."

"There is no need of going further," rejoined the Saxon. "I am acquainted in this hamlet, and if there is shelter to be found, they will find it for me. But we will not all enter at present. I have no doubt that our enemies will come this way ; and if they do, they must not find our tracks. Do you



remain here while I go forward and make inquiries. I will not be gone long."

Thus speaking, Gaspard rode away ; and when he was gone Orlando slid from his saddle and lay down upon the grass. He was very weak, and he felt much pain in his head and limbs. He had endured much for one in his situation. Only a few short hours before he had been at the very gate of death from starvation, and all this labor he had endured upon the resuscitating power of a little bread and wine. Rosabel was quickly by his side, and as she brushed back his hair with her hand, she asked him if she could help him. He gazed up into her face, and, forgetful of his pain, he replied :

"I am helped already. Thy sympathy, lady, is a cordial that makes my soul strong. But you need not fear. I am only weak. Rest will cure me."

When Gaspard came back he was accompanied by a man whom he introduced as his friend Marco Pazoli. The new-comer was of middle age ; of a light, active frame ; dressed in the garb of a mountaineer ; with a bow and quiver upon his back, and a short javelin in his hand.

"This man," said Gaspard, "you need not fear to trust. He has spent his life among the mountains, and he can take you to a place where no enemy can find you. What say you, Sir Orlando?"

"I will go with him," replied our hero, "for his face recommendeth him to my love." And as the youth spoke he struggled to his feet, and leaned against his horse ; though he required help before he could reach his saddle.



"If you trust me," said the hunter, whose speech was frank and manly, "you will trust one who never knew what it was to betray a friend. I shall take you to the mountains, and give you shelter beneath a roof fashioned by the hand of God himself ; and when you are once there you will be safe."

"I have thought this course best," explained Gaspard. "We could find shelter in the village, but we could not enter without being seen by many curious eyes, and if pursuers should happen this way, such a course might lead to trouble."

"The mountain is the safest place," said Rosabel. "Let us not go to the village."

"There is one thing more," pursued Gaspard. "It is the knight who needs rest ; and when he is strong enough he will follow me across the Alps into Germany. But you, lady, need not remain here. A few leagues further on we will change horses, and before the setting of this day's sun you may be well into Tyrol."

Rosabel did not hesitate. Turning to the hunter, she asked :

"Is there room in the cavern for me?"

"Yes, lady."

"And for Hippolita?"

"Yes."

"Then I go with Sir Orlando, for he may need a woman's nursing. When he is able to move on, I will move with him."

The Saxon made no objection.

"You have a kind nurse, sir knight," he said to our hero.



But Vendorme made no reply, nor did he show his face. His head was bowed, and he seemed deeply moved. Gaspard saw the emotion, and without waiting for a prolonged silence he turned again to the princess :

“Fair lady, you can go with the hunter, and you may be sure of safety if you are yourself careful. I have only one promise to exact from you, that is, that you will be governed by Marco's advice so far as exposing yourself to danger is concerned.”

“I shall be discreet,” replied Rosabel.

“And you, Sir Orlando—may I not lay an injunction upon you? I myself am as nothing, but I act for one who hath some influence, and that influence I may safely pledge in your behalf. And so I urge you thus: Go with our good Marco, and remain with him until you see me again. I will come as soon as I can.”

Orlando promised that he would do so.

“Only,” he added, “I must judge whether accident hath befallen you. I will wait a reasonable time.”

“Then all is well. I haste away that I may the sooner return.”

With these words Gaspard of Saxony put spurs to his horse, and was soon galloping away over the plain. Upon the edge of a citron copse he turned and waved his hand, and in a moment more he had passed from sight.





## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE CAVERN.

"Now, sir knight," said the hunter, "if you and the ladies are ready, we will be moving. We had better get away from here before the people from the village come this way."

Orlando started to an erect posture, and for a moment he seemed like one just awakened from a dream.

"Marco Pazzoli, do you know that man?"

"What man?"

"The one who has just left us."

"Somewhat, sir."

"Do you know his master?"

"I have seen him."

"I mean the boy Theodore."

"Aye—it was of him I spoke. I have seen him, but beyond that I know no more than you do. And now let us be moving. If you have further questions to ask, I will answer them when we have reached our destination."

"You are right," responded Orlando, gathering up his rein. "We are ready to follow."

The hunter led the way down to the river, to a



place where the water was shallow across a bed of solid rock, and where the horses forded the stream without difficulty. In a little while he struck into a narrow path, which wound around among rocks and trees, and which no one unacquainted with its abrupt sinuosities could possibly have followed. By and by they began to ascend a steep, rough acclivity, with the same torturous winding of path, until finally the guide stopped in a narrow defile. The way seemed to be straight on, as the road opened wide and clear in that direction, but he had a different route. Turning to the right, he crowded through a mass of shrubbery and tangled vines, and a little further on the mouth of a cavern was presented to view.

"There," he said, as the party drew up before the entrance, "I do not believe that a stranger could find this place. And, what is more, I think that even you, sir knight, were you carried back to the river's bank, could not find your way up here again.

"You are safe in your opinion," replied Orlando. "But I suppose there are others who know of this cavern?"

"For ten years," replied the hunter, "I have found shelter here when passing my nights in the mountains, and three of my brothers share the secret with me; but during that time it has not, to my knowledge, been visited by any one else. Yet, before I found it, it had been used as a human habitation, but I think its former occupants have long since passed from earth. We may leave our horses here in safety, for they cannot wander far away."



Thus speaking Marco dismounted, and when he had assisted the others from their saddles, he led the way into the cave. For a short distance they proceeded in a stooping posture, but soon the way grew higher and broader, until at length they emerged into a spacious vaulted apartment, which was lighted from an aperture in the roof. Leading from this were several smaller apartments, where beds were set upon frames of wood, and where were various other articles of furniture. It was a comfortable habitation, and the fugitives seemed to breathe more freely as they found themselves within the ample protection of its massive walls.

"I think," said Orlando, resting his hand upon the hunter's arm, "that I must betake myself to one of the couches." He trembled as he spoke, and seemed ready to sink from weakness, and he might have sunk had not Pazzoli supported him.

"Upon my life, sir knight, you are well nigh exhausted. You could not have ridden much further. But you shall have rest and nourishment, and if that can help you, all may yet be well." He led the youth into one of the smaller apartments, where a comfortable bed was already prepared, and having helped him to remove his outer garments, he brought wine and a few dried dates, after which Orlando lay down, and was very soon asleep.

When the hunter returned to the main cave, he announced to the females that he was to be their cook and their servant.

"I promised Gaspard," said he, "that I would make you as comfortable as possible."



"First," interrupted Rosabel, with a show of anxiety, "tell me how is it with Sir Orlando?"

"You need not fear for him," replied Marco. "He is sleeping soundly, and when he wakes he will be much improved. And for you, ladies, I have some bread and meat in my pannier, and there is wine and water in the cave. As soon as I have prepared your breakfast, I will return to the town and procure milk and fruit, and also bring some other little articles of comfort."

It was a grateful meal which the hunter provided, and as soon as the girls had eaten they retired to places of rest which had been pointed out to them. And so, at the hour of noon, when Marco Pazzoli started down the mountain upon his errand to the village, he left his charges all fast asleep.

Just as the last rays of daylight were fading in the distant horizon, the hunter entered the cavern upon his return, and the sound of his footfall aroused Rosabel and Hippolita, who had slept soundly until now, but Vendorme did not awake.

"He may be ill," said the princess.

"I think not," returned Marco. "He is sleeping off a prostrating fatigue."

"But—he should have awakened by this time, sir."

"Nay, lady," said the hunter, shaking his head, and yet allowing a light smile to creep around the corners of his mouth, "I fancy you would not have been yet awake had not my entrance aroused you."

"But the knight slept before I did, sir."

"Not long, lady; and moreover, you must



remember that he was more in need of sleep than you were."

As the princess made no reply to this, Marco proceeded to make preparations for supper. But Rosabel was not easy. She sat awhile and watched the movements of her cavern host, and then arose and took one of the candles which he had lighted. With a noiseless tread she approached the apartments where the knight lay, and as noiselessly did she enter. She was careful to make no sound which might disturb the sleeper, but she forgot her candle, and as its rays fell upon the knight's face, he awoke.

"Help! help!" he groaned, struggling to free himself from the clothing.

Impulsively the maiden started to his side, and tenderly brushed the raven locks from his brow.

"You are safe," she said. "Do you not know where you are?"

He raised his head, and as he gazed upon the beautiful face that bent over him, he seemed to recover his senses.

"Lady Rosabel! Ah—I remember. We are in the cave. Gaspard of Saxony brought us hither."

As he spoke he raised himself to a sitting posture, and presently he stood erect.

"Are you better, sir?"

"Much better, lady. My head is more steady. I think food would help me now."

"It was for that I came," returned Rosabel. "It is now evening, and our host is preparing supper. Will you join us?"

"Aye, most willingly."



And he walked out with her, leaning upon her arm.

The meal was a nourishing one, and when Orlando arose from the board he felt very much like his old self. His head ached no more, and he could stand without difficulty. But he was not strong. He walked a few times up and down the large cave, and then shook his head as he sank upon a seat.

"I need more rest," he said with a smile, "but there is nothing beyond that. A few days will restore to me my strength."

"Let that be your only care," returned the hunter. "If you will look to your health, I will attend to the other wants."

At an early hour the knight again sought his couch, and shortly afterwards Rosabel and Hippolita followed his example. It was on this evening, after they had retired, that Hippolita begged of the princess that she would never tell Vendorme how she had worked against him.

"I did not realize what I was doing," she urged. "I knew not how to disobey my master, and I followed his directions with fear and trembling. And yet—O, yet, lady, had I known what was intended—had I known the fate to which the young hero had been doomed—I could not, I would not, have done as I did. O, I hope and pray that he may never know all. Let the last act make recompense for the first."

"Rest easy, Hippolita," replied the princess, placing her hand kindly upon the girl's head. "Sir Orlando shall not know that you were ever led to



work knowingly against him. If you are true and faithful henceforth, he shall only bless you for the service you have rendered him. And, furthermore, in promising this I am not departing from my own choice ; for, truly, I think both the knight and myself owe you much. And so, we will be friends."

Hippolita went to sleep with the name of the princess, mingled with blessings, upon her lips.

On the following day, Orlando was strong enough to walk without fatigue ; and by the time the shades of night gathered over the mountain again, he felt almost as well as ever.

Another morning came, and when the knight arose from the table, he smote his hand upon his breast until the cavern resounded with the echoes of the blows.

"I am myself once more," he said ; "and am ready now for work. When will Gaspard return?"

"In a few days," replied Marco ; "and perhaps sooner. He may be here to-morrow. However, you will wait till he returns."

"I don't know about that."

"I think it will be best."

Our hero had no desire to dispute or argue with his kind host, so he walked away to the entrance, and did not come back until the board had been cleared.

During that forenoon Orlando did not once speak with the princess, but walked apart by himself. After dinner, however, he approached her, as she sat alone.



"Lady," he said, his voice trembling as he spoke, "I should esteem it a privilege if you would grant me a few moments of your time."

"As many moments as you desire, sir," she replied.

"I would ask you a few questions."

"I will answer them to the best of my ability. But first, sir, will you be seated?"

He sat down by her side, and after a little hesitation proceeded :

"First, lady, I think that Hippolita was deceived by those who sent her to my shop. I know you have already made some explanation of this ; but my poor head was in such a whirl at the time that I may not have understood it."

"She was instructed to tell you a falsehood, sir," replied Rosabel. "I had no knowledge of her errand at the time."

"So I thought. And she it was who first conceived the idea of setting me free?"

"Yes, sir ; for she alone, of all who were willing to befriend you, knew of your danger."

"And you, lady, knowing that she purposed to open my prison door, took advantage of the occasion for your own escape?"

"You do not put the question fairly, sir. The event resulted in my escape ; but my escape was not the prime object. Hippolita, when she found to what a dreadful fate she had been instrumental in leading you, resolved to set you free if she could ; but she could not do this without my assistance. She sought me, and I helped her."



Orlando bowed his head, and after a little he resumed :

“And thus, lady, we are both escaped from Milan. As for myself, I am as a wanderer upon the desert. Whither my feet shall turn when I leave this place I do not know. If I can serve you, you may command me. If I can aid you, I am as your slave. You have but to speak.”

Rosabel was silent.

“Perhaps,” continued the knight, “you have your course marked out—you have friends whom you will seek?”

The princess had been sitting for some time with her eyes bent upon the rock at her feet. She raised her head, and after gazing for a moment into her companion's face, she said, in a low, tremulous tone :

“I was young when my father died, and the duke of Milan was made guardian over me. From that time I have been so completely under the control of the tyrant that I have had no opportunity to make many friends in the outer world. When the dreadful marriage with Ludovico was urged upon me, I began to look about me for help. My thoughts turned first to Bergamo, but I knew not whom I could trust there; for those who held stations of authority would not dare to cross the path of the duke. In every direction I turned my attention, but the needed help I could not find. Finally the dark day was close upon me, and my whole future of joy or sorrow hung upon the chances of an hour. It was in that hour I met you. I need not recount



what then passed. My scheme of redemption failed, and I was cast back upon the mercy of the tyrant ; while you, for having tried to help me, were banished from your native city."

"Aye, lady—I remember all that."

"Again," pursued Rosabel, "was the dreadful fate upon me. On the very evening when Hippolita came to me, the duke had been before her, and informed me that I was to wed with his son on the next day ; and, furthermore, he showed to me an edict from the Pope of Rome, ordering the marriage, so that even my power to give up my property to the church, and enter a convent, was taken from me. In an unexpected moment the opportunity presented itself of escape with you. What followed I need not tell. I can only say—we are here, and whither next my feet shall tend I know not."

There was a palpable tremor in the knight's frame, but he had nerved himself for the task, and he was determined to go on to the end.

"Lady," he said, "I remember very well what has transpired, even to the words that have been spoken ; but I cannot forget that you have been acting under powerful extraneous influences. You came to me first for help ; you came helpless—defenceless ; and the words which you then spoke were spoken under circumstances over which you had no control. In short, I dare not presume upon the past. But now, lady, we are free. Ere long the Saxon will return to conduct us away. If it be your wish—"

"Say on, sir."



"I was about to say—if it be your wish that our paths should henceforth diverge, you have but to speak."

"Nay, sir," said Rosabel; "you have no right to put that duty upon me."

"But I must put it upon you."

"Why so?"

"Because, if the choice were left with me, the word would never be spoken. Pardon me if I offend."

"What word would never be spoken?"

"The word of separation between thee and me."

Rosabel of Bergamo placed her hand within Orlando's embrace, and looking up into his face she said :

"As I once told thee beneath the roof of thy lowly shop, so now I tell thee again—tell thee when I am free to act as I please."

\* \* \* \* \*

Half an hour afterwards the princess called her attendant.

"Hippolita," she said, holding our hero by the hand as she spoke, "that you may know the full meaning of all you see and hear, and be thus enabled to serve me more understandingly, I have thought it fit that you should be taken fully into my confidence. Know, then, that to this gentleman my heart is given, and my hand is pledged."





## CHAPTER XV.

### ALONE !

On the third morning Orlando arose, professing to feel as strong as he ever felt in his life.

"Only," he said, "I feel the need of fresh air and exercise. I cannot remain here much longer. If the Saxon does not make his appearance soon, we must make our own way out of Lombardy."

The truth was, our hero had begun to grow restive under restraint. He did not like to wear a yoke. He did not like the idea of holding himself under the control of a man whose purposes were unknown to him. He believed that Gaspard was honest—that Gaspard meant to assist him—but he liked not to thus acknowledge Gaspard's authority. Or, perhaps there was something deeper than this: He may not have been satisfied with the manner in which Gaspard kept his own counsel. It may not have pleased him that the Saxon had concealed from him so much important matter. However, be that as it may, the knight was uneasy; and, but for the earnest appeal of Marco Pazzoli, which had some effect upon the decision of Rosabel, he would have departed on this very morning for the north.



"I don't know," said the hunter, after the breakfast had been disposed of, "but that you might take a turn with me further up the mountain. I have thought of taking my bow, and pursuing some game."

"Aye, gladly," interrupted Rosabel, who saw that her lover needed the exercise.

"But there is one thing more," added Marco. "You must not wander away from the cave. Within these walls you are as safe as safe can be; but I cannot answer for the result of your wandering off."

"You need not fear for us," returned the princess. "You will not be gone long?"

"Not more than two or three hours."

"That is not longer than you were gone on the afternoon of the day of our arrival, when Sir Orlando was helpless; and if there was no danger then there can be none now."

"Certainly not," replied the hunter; and then turning to Vendorme, he added, "I think, sir, you need the exercise, and if you will make preparation, we will soon be off. I have an extra bow and plenty of arrows."

Our hero gladly embraced the opportunity, and when he was ready to set forth he took Rosabel's hand and pressed it to his lips.

"You will be very careful," the maiden said, gazing up with anxious fondness into his face.

"Aye, Rosabel; and I was about to lay the same injunction upon you."

"O, be not anxious on my account. It is you who



are going into danger. You will find us all safe when you come back."

"And when I do come, sweet love, I hope I may bring some trophy worthy of your acceptance." He pressed her hand to his lips again, and then followed Pazzoli from the cavern.

For half an hour the two girls sat together in the great cave, their conversation running upon a great many different topics ; and at the end of that time Rosabel suggested the idea of going to the entrance, and looking out upon the clear sky.

"We will not wander away," she said, "nor will we go from the cave itself."

"Surely," replied Hippolita, "there can be no possible harm in that. Why—of course there cannot," she continued, gaining confidence from her own reason. "We are safe because we are in a cavern ; we are safe because the cavern is a secret place ; and the cavern is a secret place simply because people do not know where the entrance is. So, it is very plain that we should be just as safe at the entrance of the cave as we are in here."

This reasoning was so plain and self-evident that the princess at once arose and led the way to the mouth of the cave. But when they had reached that point they were no better off than before, for a dense mass of interwoven vine shut them in from any extended view. Upon one hand, however, they saw an open space, and a way which seemed to lead up to the roof of the cavern. Surely there could be no harm in going up there. They would not venture out beyond the cover of their retreat ; but this way,



so narrow and so rugged, was evidently within the secret place. It might lead to the top of the rock, whence they could obtain a grand view. Rosabel started up first. She had to move very carefully, clambering from stone to stone, clinging by roots and rocky points ; and at length she arrived upon a level table of rock, upon three sides of which arose perpendicular walls, while upon the fourth was a net-work of shrub and vine, growing out from a crevice, very much like that which guarded the mouth of the cavern. Of course, so much labor must not be lost. If they could pass this barrier they would in all probability gain a view of the mountains, and perhaps look off upon the distant country. Rosabel pushed her way through, and she was not disappointed. She stood upon a broad table of rock, with the mountain peaks towering in sublime grandeur above her on one hand, while upon another she gazed off upon the plains and rivers. It was a wild scene, and for a long time the two adventurers gazed in silence.

"We will not go any further," said Rosabel.

"We had better not," replied Hippolita.

"No, we will sit here and enjoy the scene, and breathe the fresh air. I suppose, if we were so inclined, we could wander away as far as we pleased, for I doubt not but some of the passes are open. But we will remain here. I will not forget my promise to Sir Orlando."

The girls sat down upon a loose fragment of rock, and after discussing various matters connected with the scenery, the conversation turned upon their



flight from Milan. The princess had discovered that her companion possessed an intellect of uncommon clearness ; that she was endowed with a good share of wit; and, furthermore, she had found her true-hearted and kind ; and hence she had come to trust her with the deepest thought of her soul.

"Were you surprised when I told you that I had pledged my hand to the knight?" Rosabel asked, as the conversation seemed to legitimately approach that point.

"Indeed I was not, lady. I knew that it must be so. How could it be otherwise?"

"O—it might have been otherwise, Hippolita. I need not have pledged him my hand had it pleased me otherwise."

"Ah—but, my dear mistress, when we are left to our own will, we are very sure to give our hand where our heart is gone."

"But, Hippolita, I need not have given my heart."

The attendant shook her head.

"The heart is not a creature of the will, lady. The heart of the maiden is not the slave of her choice. Rather the choice is the slave of her heart. If you had never seen Orlando Vendorme, or if you had never spoken to him, it might have been different; but such a man once seen and known, is sure to be loved. In all Lombardy I have not seen his equal. Ah, lady, your love is blessed."

Rosabel bowed her head, for this last remark touched her deeply. Hippolita waited a little while and then resumed :



"As I compared the noble young knight whom I had led to the dungeon with the master whom I had served, I was so worked upon that I could have laid down my life to save the victim. And, lady, I might not have dared to come to you for aid had I not known you loved him. Ah, your love was not a secret."

"You speak truly," said Rosabel. "I gave Vendorme my heart when I first knew him; and I have now only to pray that no calamity may overtake us. I ask not to have back my wealth or my titles. I leave them all behind, content never to see my native land again, so that my love is safe."

"Speaking of this," remarked Hippolita, "leads me to ask what steps you mean to take in the future. Do you know whither the Saxon means to lead us?"

"No," replied Rosabel. "I only know that he has proved a friend thus far, and I am willing to trust him. And I am the more ready to follow him because I know that he serves those whom Manfred fears and hates."

"You speak of the Saxon knights?"

"Yes."

"And you speak truly, my dear lady. I overheard de Castro and Ludovico talking on that very subject. They spoke particularly of the youthful count, Theodore; and I know that they were troubled exceedingly. Ha!"

"What is it?"

"Mercy!"

The girls started to their feet, and a cry of horror



escaped from their lips as a human being came tumbling down from one of the high crags close at hand. It was a man, and he fell near where they stood. They had heard him first—had heard him utter a cry of alarm; and as they looked up they saw him just losing his hold upon the treacherous rock high above them. For some moments they were utterly paralyzed, though not with fear. The sight of the bruised and senseless fellow-creature excited their keenest sympathy, and as soon as the startling shock had passed they moved to the sufferer's assistance. He was a light-framed, middle-aged man, habited in a garb of chamois skin, and upon his back was an empty quiver.

"It is some poor hunter," said Hippolita, "who has been ranging the mountains in quest of game. I hope he is not dead."

Without thought of harm or danger to herself the princess knelt by the side of the stranger, and raised his head upon her lap. There was a wound upon his temple, and he must have been bruised in other places. Rosabel spoke to him, but he made no answer, nor did he betray any sign of consciousness.

"There is life in his heart," she said, looking up into her attendant's face, "and if we had him in the cavern we might revive him. If he remains here he may die."

"We can carry him down," returned Hippolita. "He is not heavy, and the distance is short."

"We will carry him down," added Rosabel. "The



life of a fellow-creature must not be lost while we have power to save it."

With this generous motive the girls lifted the senseless form from the rock, and bore it down by the way they had ascended. It was a difficult task, and many times did they slip, and come near falling; but a noble fortitude gave them uncommon strength, and finally they reached the mouth of the cave, where they were forced to stop and take breath. After a little while they bore their burden in, and when they had fixed a bed and a pillow, Hippolita brought water and some cordial. The wound upon the temple was washed, the brow bathed, and the hands chafed; and ere long the sufferer opened his eyes. In a little while his senses had so far returned to him that he raised himself upon his elbow, and asked where he was.

"You are safe, and in good hands," replied Rosabel. "Partake of this, and you will feel better."

She extended to him a cup of wine, which he drank at a draught; and very soon afterwards he sat up and gazed curiously upon his nurses.

"Am I dead?" he muttered, "or do angels inhabit these mountains? What has happened? How is it that I am here?"

"You slipped and fell upon the rocks," said Rosabel; "and we chanced to be near enough to pick you up."

"And who are you?" the man asked, looking sharply into the face of the princess.

"That I am a friend, sir, I think I have already



shown. Further than that it could not benefit you to know."

"Pardon me, lady. I meant not to be inquisitive." He gazed upon her a moment more—gazed from her face to her fine apparel, and upon the resplendent jewel that sparkled upon her bosom, and then added, in an easy tone—"Yes, yes—I remember. I was pursuing a wild goat—I had fired an arrow—I was eager for the game—I placed my foot upon a treacherous rock, and fell. That is the last until I find myself here. But I think I have not been badly hurt. This blow upon my head stunned me—that was all. My limbs are sound." And thus speaking he arose and walked to and fro across the cave. "My dear ladies, how can I recompense you for what you have done?"

"We have our recompense already, sir, in having done some little good. But, if you would do us a favor, you will forget that you have ever seen us."

"Fair lady, that were impossible."

"You know my meaning, sir."

"Pardon me. I understand. My lips are sealed. But—are you here alone?"

"We have companions at hand. They have been hunting, as you were ; but they must be here very soon. Will you rest until they come?"

"I ought not. I have left friends down the mountain who will be anxious. Will you give me one more cup of your wine?"

Rosabel gave him the wine, and when he had drank it he said that he must go.

"I am strong enough to walk down the moun-



tain, but there is a ringing in my head which warns me that I may need nursing to-night. Upon my life, fair ladies, it would afford me joy to remain with you, but I must not. I thank you a thousand times for the service you have rendered. I shall never forget it; and until chance shall throw the opportunity in my way for some return of the favor, my gratitude must suffice. I think I can find my way out."

When he reached the mouth of the cave he saw the path which led through the mass of vines, and without stopping to speak again with the girls, he pushed his way out, and was soon lost to sight.

Rosabel was the first to speak after the stranger had gone.

"I hope no harm can come of this."

"We could not have done differently," said Hippolita.

"We might have nursed the stranger away from the cave," suggested the princess; "and we might have found out who he was."

"I don't think there can be any danger, my dear mistress. He is evidently one of the village hunters. At all events, I think we did but our duty."

Now that the man had gone, both the girls found time to reflect upon consequences; and though they tried to assure each other, still it was very evident that they had fears which were not expressed.

"We will not worry," said Rosabel; "but when Orlando returns we will tell him what has happened, and he may do what he thinks proper."

By and by the hunters came back, bringing with



them a goodly lot of game, and while Orlando was telling the story of their excursion over the mountains, Marco prepared the dinner, for it was past the hour of noon. Rosabel did not yet say anything about the stranger who had been in the cave, thinking that she would wait until she could speak with her lover alone. The dinner was eaten, and after the things had been cleared away, Orlando and Marco went out from the cave, and shortly afterwards the knight came back alone.

"Now," he said, taking a seat by Rosabel's side, "we will pass away the hours as best we can. Marco has gone down the mountain, and will not return until to-morrow. O, how much better I feel for my exercise. I am strong again, love—as strong as when I smote down Hugh de Castro in the list."

"And I have had the fresh air, Orlando."

"Ah—have you?"

"Yes. Hippolita and I found our way to the top of our cavern."

"Ah,—I am glad if you enjoyed it."

"But we had an adventure." And thereupon Rosabel told to her lover all that had happened—forgetting nothing—relating everything, even to the words which the stranger had spoken.

Orlando was startled; and it was plain to be seen that the event had made him uneasy, though he would not speak his feelings.

"We meant no harm," said Rosabel. "It was I who led the way out from the cave; and when the



poor man was cast helpless at our feet we could not leave him to suffer."

"Dearest Rosabel," replied Orlando, taking her hand, "if you have erred, it has surely been on the side of a noble duty. God forbid that I should blame you. And yet I wish it had not so happened. I wish the stranger had not been thrown upon your mercy. But let us say no more about it. On the morrow we shall leave this place, whether the Saxon returns or not, and until then we will cheer ourselves with pleasant hopes."

And thus did the knight try to dispose of the subject of the stranger's visit to the cave, but he could not so easily throw it from his mind. More than once during the afternoon was he lost in reflection upon it, and when his companion asked him why he looked so serious, he tried to laugh away her suspicions.

Supper time came, and Hippolita set the table, and cleared it away again. The evening passed, and when Rosabel arose to retire, the knight pressed her hand to his lips.

"Sweet angels guard and preserve you," he said. His voice trembled, and he held her hand for some moments after he had spoken.

"All will be right to-morrow," replied the princess. "God bless you." She raised her face to his, and he kissed her lips. And then she went away to her little apartment, followed by Hippolita.

For an hour after this did Vendorme keep watch in the cave, but at length he grew tired and sleepy, and concluded to seek his couch. He went out to



the entrance, where all was still and quiet, and when he came back he retired to his sleeping apartment.

"I wish they had not brought that stranger into the cave," he said, as he cast himself upon his bed.

By and by he slept, and he dreamed that the stranger came back to the cave in the shape of a fiery dragon, and carried off the princess. He started up in terror, but it was only a wild fancy. He lay awake for a long time, but finally fatigue overpowered him, and this time he slept more soundly.

He slept an hour—perhaps two hours—and then he awoke again. This time he heard a sharp cry, as of some one in distress—a cry for mercy—for help. Did he dream again? No; for now, as he sat up, with his senses clear, he heard the sound of feet, and a smothered groan. It was distant from him, but he could hear it plainly. As quickly as possible he leaped from his bed, and made his way out into the great cavern, but all was dark and silent as Erebus there. He called the name of Rosabel—called it twice—thrice, but no reply. He ventured into the place where the lady and her attendant had slept, and called again, and yet no answer. He laid his hand upon the couch, and no one was there. Quickly as possible he struck a light, and examined the cavern in all its parts.

He was alone, and Rosabel was gone! He called her name once more—called out in the deep agony of his tortured soul—and the answer was only the echoes of his own voice from the vaulted arches of the gloomy cavern.





## CHAPTER XVI.

### COMPANIONS ON THE ROAD.

Vendorme's first thought, as soon as he was composed enough to think, was of the stranger who had been taken into the cave. Through his agency the enemy had come and borne the princess away. With swift movements he donned his outer clothing, and buckled on his sword ; and then, having lighted the lantern which Marco had left, he made his way from the cave. For some distance he followed the path by which he had been led on his ascent, and at length he reached a point where a bed of soft sand had been washed across the way. He stopped here and examined the tracks—some of them were fresh, and upon these he bestowed particular attention. He found footprints revealing the recent passage of six persons over the sand—two of them were delicate prints, made by the feet of a woman ; and all had gone down the mountain. With rapid strides the knight sprang over the rocks where the way was remembered ; but more than once he was forced to retrace his steps upon finding himself in places where all forward movement was cut off.

At length it was evident that he had lost his way.



He went back a piece, and became more involved than before. A little while he reflected, and then resolved to push on down the declivity, believing that he must come out at the foot of the mountain at some time. It was a severe task, but he kept persistently on. Over rocks ; through thick masses of tangled vine ; down steep gorges ; sometimes forced to back out from impassable chasms ; and often stumbling and falling. At length he lost his lantern ; and after hours of toil he found himself in a situation where he gave up in despair. He was shut in by towering cliffs ; unable to find the path by which he had entered ; and enveloped in a darkness as black and impenetrable as the closed tomb. Many times he tried to make his way out, and as many times did he fail. In the end he was forced to give up, and throw himself upon the hard rocks for rest. When daylight came he arose, and finally succeeded in freeing himself from the trap ; and after laboring an hour longer he reached the foot of the mountain, and soon afterwards gained the river. He was nearly opposite the village, and not far from where he stood was a small boat. He gained this, and upon reaching the opposite bank the first person he met was Marco Pazzoli.

“In heaven’s name,” cried the hunter, as soon as he was sure that his eyes did not deceive him, “what does this mean ? Are you Orlando Vendorme ?”

“In truth I am.”

“Good sir knight, you are mad !”

“By Saint Paul, you speak the truth, Marco. I



am mad. Enough has happened to drive angels to madness. The princess of Bergamo is lost!"

"What! Dead!"

"No. She has been snatched away from the cavern. They came last night, while I slept, and dragged her off. I heard the noise; but before I could follow they were beyond my reach. I started in pursuit and lost my way, and here I am. O, Marco, have you not seen them? Have you not heard something?"

"In the name of wonder," gasped the hunter, seeming almost inclined to believe that the knight was crazy, "how could it have happened? Who could have found the cave?"

"Ah, Marco, there is the trouble. You did not know it when you went away yesterday; and I did not know it until after you were gone. The girls conveyed a stranger into the cavern. Hold. Let me tell you how it was."

And thereupon Orlando related, in as few words as possible, the story which Rosabel had told to him concerning the unfortunate hunter; and concluded by relating more particularly the events of the past night.

"I fear," said Marco, after listening to the account, "that the lady has fallen into the hands of an enemy. But let us go to my cot. It is not far away; and there we can talk while you rest."

The hunter's dwelling was upon the outskirts of the village, and when they reached it, Marco led the way to an apartment where they could be alone, and where refreshment was soon provided.



"Did Rosabel give you any description of the man whom she took into the cave?" asked the host, while our hero was eating.

"Yes," replied Vendorme. "He was a small, light-framed man; of middle age; with a piercing black eye, and long, flowing hair; and habited in a garb of chamois skin."

"Ah—I know the fellow well," said Marco. "He is a spy of the robber band that infest the mountains. And I may tell you now what I have not told you before: These robbers have been searching for you. They have been seen hovering around the village; they have been scouring the country beyond here; and some of their messengers have been making inquiries of the peasants. It is very plain that the lady Rosabel has fallen into their hands. The spy could never have found the cave but for that wonderful accident. It is very bad."

"It is terrible!" cried Vendorme, smiting his fist upon his bosom. "But I must not remain here idle."

"What would you do, sir knight?"

"Give pursuit to the villains."

"Do you think it possible to overcome them as you are now?"

"That is not the question of a brave man."

"But it is a proper question for a wise man, Sir Orlando—if you will pardon the freedom. But I have a better plan. If you will wait here, I will go out and make inquiries; and if the princess has been taken towards Milan I can easily find it out. Will you trust thus much to me?"



"You will not be long?"

"No. I have a fleet horse."

"Then go."

"But you will remain here."

"Yes—I will wait a reasonable time."

The hunter went away, and for two hours Orlando was alone in the cot. He was becoming almost tired of the task, and was pacing nervously to and fro across the narrow apartment, when his host returned.

"What news?"

"First," said Marco, taking a seat as he spoke "you must answer me a question. Do you think it possible that the Duke of Milan could engage the robbers to assist him?"

"Why not?" returned Orlando. "These robbers will work for anybody who will pay them."

"Ah, but you misunderstand me. I know the robbers would work for him; but would he engage them? Would Manfred of Milan give his work into the hands of outlaws?"

"Oho—you don't know the villainous tyrant if you ask such a question. I believe these robbers have been in his employ, more or less, for years. I know that the captain of his guard has employed them. Aye—and I know more: I know that men have served in the ducal guard, and been members of the robber band at one and the same time."

"Then," said Marco, "I can tell you where the lady Rosabel has gone. A party of the robber knights, four in number, have borne her to Milan. They crossed the Saveso, just above Monzo, before



daylight this morning. And of course," he added, after a pause, "the question of her whereabouts can no longer be an open one."

"No," groaned Orlando, pressing his hands together. "It is as my worst fears pointed. What—what can we do?"

"Why not wait for the coming of the Saxon?" suggested Marco.

"But who knows when he will come? I may wait here a week, and in that time Rosabel's fate is sealed. By heaven, I should die ere that. I cannot do it. If I would live, I must act."

"And what will you do, sir knight? It is not for me to dictate; nor do I know that I can properly advise. Gaspard came to me, and asked me to conduct you to a safe retreat, where you could remain until he returned. I did as he wished; and I think you will admit that, but for an unforeseen accident, all would have gone as I had planned."

"Aye, Marco, I admit more than that," cried the knight, who was touched by his host's keen disappointment. "If all had been done as you ordered, this thing might not have happened. The blame must rest upon me. I ought not to have left the females alone in the cave. But it is too late to think of these things. I must go to Milan."

"Can you do anything, when once there, commensurate with the risk you run?"

"Yes—yes," exclaimed the knight, striding across the floor. "I can die in a true cause. That is something. But I think I can do more. I have friends in Milan. I believe I can stir up a rebellion



that shall shake the ducal throne ! Marco—I go to Milan !”

“But not now, sir. If you must go, had you not better wait until night ? You should understand the reason for such a course.”

“You are right, good Marco. I will wait until the shadow falls again, and under its cover I will go. You will have a horse ready for me ?”

“Yes.”

It was a long, tedious day for Orlando Vendorme ; but he worried through the creeping hours as best he could, and when the shadows of evening began to fall, he was anxious to be off.

“A horse is ready for you,” said Marco Pazzoli, after they had eaten supper, “but there is danger in your way.”

“I know there is danger, and I am ready to meet it. I have lived in the midst of danger for months. But if you have brought for me a fleet horse, I fear not.”

“I have procured one of the fleetest to be found.”

“That is enough ; and now I am off. Why do you hold on upon me ?”

“Sir Knight, I would have you fully appreciate the danger you are to meet. The robbers must be lying in wait for you ; and now that the princess is found, they will have narrower limits for their search. If I thought I could be of assistance to you, I would willingly go with you.”

“I thank you, Marco ; but your company is not needed. It would be of no use. Now let me go.”

The hunter still held on upon the knight's arm,



“Sir Orlando, I must say my say, even though it offend you. I do not like to see you start off. A day can make no difference, and by another sun the Saxon may be here.”

“What care I for the Saxon?” cried Vendorme, pulling himself away from the grasp of his host. “I have listened to him too much already. If I had not minded him I might have been—”

“Where?”

“Far from here, at all events. But enough of that. I suppose the Saxon did what he thought was best, and I thank him; but I do not choose to hang like a dependent upon him. I am off for Milan, and my good sword shall insure me a path. Farewell, good Marco—and if we ever meet again I will recount to you my adventures.”

“And,” returned the hunter, with a dubious shake of the head, “if I am not greatly deceived, you will have adventures enough before you reach Milan. But I need not warn you more. I can only pray that you may reach the city in safety.”

“Mine be the risk,” said Vendorme, moving towards the door.

As they reached the little door they were met by Pazzoli's wife, who had a garment in her hand.

“I came near forgetting that,” said Marco; “for I had hoped that there might be no occasion for it. Your doublet, sir knight, is very conspicuous, and I have thought this peasant's frock and hat might be of service to you.”

Orlando readily accepted the offer; and when he had pulled on the frock, and exchanged his plumed



cap for the wide-rimmed hat, he stepped out and was soon in the saddle.

"Farewell, Marco."

"God be with thee ! was the hunter's response.

Orlando left the village at an easy trot, and as soon as the country was open before him, he started his horse into a gallop. The night was not quite so dark as he could have wished. A moon, four days old, hung in the western heavens, and though fleecy clouds were sweeping over it, yet the light was very palpable. However, this seeming trouble had its advantage—it rendered the road more plain, so that the rider could dash on with less risk of stumbling. At the end of an hour he struck into a deep wood which stretched along through a valley, and when he emerged from this he ascended a steep acclivity, at the brow of which he was brought up by half a dozen horsemen who had arranged themselves across the path. He would have dashed on past them, but his horse refused to go.

"Hallo ! Who is this ?"

It was this call from one of the strangers that had led the knight's horse to stop, and an application of the spur only caused him to rear and plunge.

"Who are you ?"

When our hero found that his beast would not be urged on, he replied to the summons :

"I am from Como, and I am in haste, too."

"And who are you when in Como ?"

"A poor peasant, as you may see."

"A sharp spur you wear for a peasant,"



"I arm my heels as I please, sirs. Will you let me pass?"

At that moment the moon, which was close down upon the horizon, looked out from behind the flying clouds, and Orlando saw that his opponents were armed banditti. But the moon had not favored him alone with clearer vision. The robbers, even, had the advantage, for while their backs were towards the gleaming orb, he was facing it.

"Ha, ha, my master!" cried one of them.

"What now, villains?"

"Sir Orlando Vendorme—we have been waiting for you!"

Our hero drew his sword, and as the robbers gathered about him he sought to defend himself; but his horse was not used to such work. The animal reared and plunged again, and refused to come near to the armed villains. Now, perhaps the restive beast might be urged forward, and make recompense by his speed for his shortcomings. Vendorme shortened the rein, and plied the spur; but he was doomed to disappointment; for one of the robbers, who had quietly dismounted, glided up and plunged a javelin deep behind the horse's shoulder. Our hero saw the act, and as his animal staggered under him, he sought to leap from the saddle. He cleared his right foot from the stirrup; but, unfortunately, the skirt of his peasant's frock had been pinned to the horse's side by the javelin, and when he left his seat he was dangling beneath the beast's belly; and, in a moment more the animal fell, crushing him helpless upon the earth.



"By the mass," cried one of the robbers, "I didn't think we'd capture him so easily."

"He's fast sure enough," responded another.

It was now Orlando's turn to speak, and he used his speech in begging for help. The dead horse was resting upon his legs in such a way as to give him most exquisite torture, and he involuntarily groaned for assistance. Three of the robbers pulled the horse away, while the other three stood ready to secure the prisoner, which they did without much difficulty; for the youth was so racked with pain that he had no thought of resistance. In fact, before he fairly realized that the torturing weight had been removed from his limbs, he had been rolled over upon his breast, and his arms drawn up and lashed behind him. In a little while afterwards, he was raised to a sitting posture, and asked if he could stand.

"Not yet," he replied. He gazed around upon his captors, and finally asked what they meant.

"We mean enough!" returned the leader. "We haven't forgotten the kindly turn you did us when we fell upon the Saxon knights! Have you forgotten that, my master?"

"No—I remember it very well, but I do not believe that is all you have against me. You are not the men to take such trouble for simple revenge. I know you better."

"By our lady you are right, Vendorme. But enough of that. You are our prisoner, and you won't find it easy to escape us. We have been looking for you. We saw you cross the river this morn-



ing, and go into the village with Marco Pazzoli, and we believed you would start for Milan before the night was past. But my bold knight, we did not count upon so cheap a victory. We expected some hard knocks, and were prepared to sell one or two lives for the reward—"

"Speak on. What reward?"

"Never mind."

"You have said enough," cried Vendorme. "I know very well who is your master."

"Be careful and not know too much. And now, Sir Champion, if you think you can sit upon a horse, we'll be moving."

"Whither?"

"You shall find that out in due time. Only let me say this ; you'll fare best if you are quiet."

The prisoner really had no choice otherwise, for his hands were secured behind him, and his legs were so weak from the strain they had received that he could scarcely stand. He was lifted upon the back of a horse, the owner of the animal walking by his side to hold him on, and thus led away by a narrow, dark path, into the wood.





## CHAPTER XVII.

### PRAYER !

As the reader must already be aware, the duke of Milan, through his captain, had, in his search for the princess, had recourse to the robbers. The outlaws had been set upon the track of the fugitives and a large reward promised them in case of success. One of their number, named Juan Toletti, who acted in the capacity of a spy, had, by some means, become assured that the princess had taken refuge somewhere upon the mountains, and, in the garb of a hunter, he made search in that direction. He had seen Marco Pazzoli ascend with provisions, and thus he gained a clue to the path, judging that the mountaineer must be carrying food to some one who dared not come down after it. With this clue he made his way up among the cliffs, and as he sat resting himself after a wearying tramp, he heard voices which seemed to sound from some point below him. He started up and moved forward, and while in the act of bending over a projecting point of rock he lost his hold and fell—fell, stunned and senseless, at the feet of the very lady of whom he was in search. How he



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was taken into the cave and nursed, and how he left, we have already seen.

As the spy made his way from the cavern, he was very careful to note the landmarks that should guide him on his return, and when he reached the foot of the mountain, he was not long in finding three of his companions, to whom he related what he had discovered. As it was then very near nightfall, they concluded not to search for any more of their number, but ascend to the cavern and try their luck as they were. Toletti went ahead with a lantern and succeeded in retracing his steps to the cave, and when they reached the entrance they stopped for consultation.

"I know where the females sleep," said the spy, "for I noticed in which direction they went when they put away their garments, and I think if we are careful we can gag them, and get them away without noise. As for Vendorme, I suppose he is in the cave, but I know not if he has any male companion."

After some deliberation it was decided that Vendorme should not be troubled if it could be avoided, as the two females might be as much of a capture as they could surely and safely make in that place.

As he had promised, Toletti led the way to the apartment where the girls slept, and by careful management they were so effectually smothered before they awoke, that they could give no immediate alarm, and thus were they borne away from the cavern, and led down the mountain, the gags being kept upon their mouths until they had got very near to the river, where horses were in waiting. As soon as



Rosabel could speak she begged for mercy, but the robbers would not listen to her. One of the villains, however, more bold than the rest, whispered into her ear that if she would go with him he would save her from the clutches of the duke. She turned eagerly towards him to find out what he meant. He meant that she should go with him and be his, and he was beginning to swear eternal fidelity and love, when she turned from him in disgust and horror. She asked no more favors at the hands of the robbers, but suffered herself to be lifted to a saddle, in which condition she was borne away towards Milan, and early in the following day she was lodged in her own apartments in the ducal palace, Hippolita still bearing her company. But the companions were not to remain long together. At noon a messenger came from Hugh de Castro and led Hippolita away, conducting her back to the dwelling of her master, where she was confined in a close apartment, with an old black woman to keep watch over her. Towards evening de Castro came, and when he stood before her he struck her on the cheek with his hand.

"Strike me again," she said, turning the other cheek to him.

"Are you so fond of being struck?" asked her master.

"Blows are what I expect, sir," she replied.

"And they are what you deserve. But tell me—how did you escape from the city?"

"I rode out upon a horse, sir."

"And Orlando Vendorme was with you?"

"He was,"



"And you set him free from his dungeon?"

"I did."

"What induced you to do such a thing?"

"That I might make some atonement for a grievous wrong which I had helped to do. When I led Vendorme to that dungeon, I did not dream of the horrible doom that awaited him. Had you told me that, no power could have induced me to help you. I helped you ignorantly, but I was not ignorant when I helped the sufferer."

"Upon my soul, girl, you are frank."

"I can afford to be so."

"Then be as frank in answering me further. Where is Orlando Vendorme?"

"I cannot tell you, sir."

"You mean—you will not."

"Put it as you please."

"Girl, if you do not answer me as I wish, you shall rue it. Now tell me—where did you leave Vendorme?"

"Once for all, sir," replied the girl, with heroic calmness, "I will not speak one word which can put the safety of Orlando Vendorme in jeopardy. Where he is now I cannot tell you, for I do not know. But that I may not be misunderstood, I tell you frankly—if I did know, I would not tell you."

De Castro clenched his fist, and struck the girl to the floor.

"Lay there, insolent wench!" he muttered, "and when I come again you will learn to answer me with more propriety. I do not leave you now because you have conquered, but because I have not the



time to waste with you." Thus speaking he left the room, closing and locking the door after him.

It was well into the evening, and Rosabel of Bergamo had slept several hours. She arose, and found a woman in attendance upon her. It was not one of her own women, but a servant whom the princess had seen at work in the garden.

"Why are you here?" Rosabel asked, when she recollected where she was, and what had transpired.

"I am here to wait upon you," was the reply, delivered in a rough, impudent way.

"And I suppose you are also here to keep guard over me?"

"No. There are soldiers in the passage who do that. But I can get supper for you, if you want it."

"I want nothing to eat. You may bring me some drink."

The woman brought the drink, and Rosabel then told her she might retire.

"I cannot do it, lady. I am ordered to remain in the room with you."

The princess was offended, but she had too much sense of pride to show any resentment, so she withdrew to a window which overlooked one of the gardens, and sat down. She had not been thus seated many minutes before the door was opened, and the duke made his appearance. The attendant was dismissed and Manfred then turned to his ward, whom he regarded for some little time in silence.

"Well," he at length said, biting off the word as



though language were insufficient to express his feelings. "So you are back again."

The princess bowed her head, and made no reply. She had determined upon the course she would pursue, and she sought the strength that might enable her to bear up.

"Did you think to escape me, Rosabel? Answer me."

"I hoped to escape, sir," she replied, looking up into his face.

"And whither had you planned to go?"

"Anywhere, so that I might be free from thy tyranny."

"Ho, ho, you are there, are you. You had no plan, I suppose! You had no lover with you!"

"I had a friend with me, sir."

"Yes, yes—and where did you leave that friend?"

"Where I hope he will be safe from the powers that are at work against him."

"Did you leave him in the place whence you were taken?"

"Send your robber minions back and let them search."

Manfred started angrily, and he seemed ready to smite the maiden with his fist.

"No, no," he said, "you shall not move me from my propriety. You are crazy, you are an idiot, you are a fool! But, my fair lady, let me tell you that men have been sent back after your gallant champion, and let me assure you that he will be taken, too, and when he is taken, he will be amply rewarded for the pains he has expended on your account.



Perhaps you can imagine what the character of that reward will be."

A sense of faintness overcame the princess for a moment. She could understand what would be Vendorme's fate if he fell into the tyrant's power, and the thought was terrible. But she struggled up from the blow, and looked the duke once more in the face.

"I know what your disposition is," she said ; "and I can imagine all the threats you would make ; so you can spare me the pain of hearing them."

"Very well. Enough, then, of Vendorme until I can tell you exactly what has become of him. And now to another matter. I propose to have you married as soon as possible. It should be done this very night, but for my own convenience I must put it off until the day after to-morrow, when you will give your hand to Ludovico. Do you think you can escape this time ?"

"Before God, the wife of Ludovico I never will be !" Rosabel spoke slowly and emphatically.

"The wife of Ludovico you must be," retorted the duke, with equal emphasis.

"I have said my say, Duke of Milan ; and you may now do your worst. Let come what may, I will never give a wife's pledge to your son."

"What care I for your pledge ! One is coming to help me whose power is above all pledges ; and it is for his presence that I wait."

The princess raised her eyes to the face of her guardian, and as he read the meaning of her look, he added :



"I wait for his holiness, the Pope of Rome, who will be here at the time I have mentioned."

"O," cried Rosabel, disguising none of the bitterness of her feeling, "you may bring him, and he may pronounce the false vows if he will. I shall not repeat them. You may so far make me a wife as to lay hands upon my estates of Bergamo; but in my soul a wife to Ludovico no power of earth can ever make me."

"Beware, girl!" said the duke, pressing his hand upon her shoulder. "You know not what you say. If you give not your soul to this marriage, you give it to perdition."

"Yes; and I say it again," cried the princess, whose feelings were now aroused. "Death is but death—and death is preferable to the fate you would impose upon me. And after death I will lay me in the arms of my Saviour, and trust to his redeeming love."

She was upon her knees, with her clasped hands raised towards Heaven; and a prayer fell from her lips, as she bowed her head till the dark tresses floated over her face. Once, while she had been speaking, the duke had started forward as though he would strike her; but when she sank upon her knees, and her voice broke into that impassioned prayer, he stopped and trembled.

"Bah!" he uttered, stamping his foot; "you are crazy! But I am glad you have spoken so frankly, even in your madness, for now I shall know how to govern myself. The marriage will come off, as I have said; and you are at liberty to make as much



trouble for yourself as you please. Only let me give you a gentle hint: You should know the disposition of Ludovico, and be thus aware of the pains you must suffer if he has more occasion to be angry with you."

When Manfred had thus spoken, he turned from the apartment, and shortly afterwards the old woman entered and resumed her watch.

Rosabel might have wept if she had been alone; but she would not shed tears in the presence of the unsympathizing sentinel. She retired to her inner chamber, where she soon sought her couch; and as she rested her head upon her pillow, she offered up new prayers to Heaven. She prayed that God would have mercy upon her; but a more fervent prayer was breathed for Orlando Vendorme.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE BLOCK.

Ludovico had not yet seen the princess since her return, and he preferred not to do so until the hour for the marriage ceremony arrived.

"If I should see her, it might only make trouble for me," he said, as he conversed with his father on the day following her arrival. "At all events, it could do no good."

"You are right, my son," replied the duke. "Since matters are arranged so safely for us, it is



not worth while to trouble the girl unnecessarily. By this marriage, we will add Bergamo to our dominions, which, with the friendship of the Consul of Rome, will make our house the most powerful in Lombardy. And, my boy, if Alfonso of Modena is not very witty—more witty than I think he will be—he shall fall beneath us.”

“But are you sure of the aid of the Roman Consul?” asked Ludovico.

“Yes,” said Manfred, rubbing his hands with evident satisfaction. “Crescentius and the Pope are both with me; and their influence cannot be well overcome. His Holiness will be here to-morrow, and will, in person, solemnize your marriage.”

Upon this Ludovico rubbed his hands, and declared that things were working better than he had even dared to hope. He had just spoken to this effect, when Hugh de Castro entered the apartment.

“How now, my captain?” cried the duke. “What brings you in such haste?”

“There is a messenger without, my lord, who would speak with you.”

“Who is he?”

De Castro cast his eyes over the apartment.

“We are alone,” said Manfred.

“The man is named Pietro Bonzo. He is one of the robbers.”

“Does he bring us news of Vendorme?”

“Yes.”

“Then let him come in.”

In a very few moments de Castro introduced the robber into the ducal presence. He was habited in



the garb of a peasant, but his face told well enough what he was.

"Well, sir," said Manfred, not at all shocked by the association, "what word do you bring?"

"My lord duke," replied the outlaw, bowing very slightly as he spoke, "a reward was offered to us on condition that we would find Rosabel of Bergamo, and restore her to your keeping; and another reward was offered for the capture of Orlando Vendorme. The lady has been restored to you. And, furthermore, Vendorme has been taken; but, as we were not directed to bring him hither, we have secured him, and are ready to produce him when it may so please you."

"So works the matter still in our favor," cried Manfred, clapping his hands exultingly. "With this fellow secure we are safe from further trouble. Where is the knight?"

"He is in a quiet nook, my lord, not many leagues away. I can bring him to you by the rising of another sun."

"I think," remarked the duke, turning to his captain, "that we do not want the fellow here."

De Castro nodded in approval of the suggestion.

"I do not see," continued his highness, "what need there is of having much more trouble with him."

The captain nodded again.

"If I am not mistaken, sir," the duke said, addressing the robber, "you do not love your prisoner much."

"We owe him nothing but vengeance, my lord."



"Then you may earn your reward easily. You can act the peasant, and I will give orders to the guard to allow you to pass with fruit for the palace. You can bring the fruit in panniers, can you not?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And in a pannier, covered with citron leaves, you can bring me the head of Orlando Vendorme?"

"Yes."

"Mind—I want only the head. I want it brought secretly and punctually. I would behold it with my own eyes."

"And so would I," added Ludovico, with a gesture of mad delight. "I would give more to see the unbodied head of Orlando Vendorme than I would to see the emperor at my feet."

"It is a safe and righteous decision," said de Castro.

"Aye," resumed the duke, "it shall be so. How is it, Pietro Bonza—shall it be done?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And there shall be no mistake—no failure?"

"There can be none, your highness. The prisoner is bound, and his keepers only await my return."

"Then bring me his head as quickly as you can."

"You shall have it to-morrow."

"At what time?"

"As early as possible. I said that I could bring the prisoner hither alive by the rising of the sun; but if I must find fruit, and prepare panniers, it may take some time longer. But it shall be sometime to-morrow."



"Remember—when the head is delivered, a hundred golden sequins are yours."

"There shall be no failure," replied the robber emphatically.

When Pietro Bonza was dismissed from the ducal presence, he made his way out from the city as quickly as possible, and started upon his return mission. He stopped at Monza to transact a little business with one of the robber agents, and just as the sun was sinking he reached the place where he had left his companions with their prisoner. He found one of the band there, but no more.

"How is this, Bernardo? Where are our companions?"

"They have gone further north, Master Pietro; and I was left to give you intelligence, and also to guide you after them."

"But why is this?"

"It is for a matter of safety. Not long after the sun was up this morning we got news that a large party of troops were on our track, and as we lay so near to their route, our captain thought it best to move. He has gone towards Como."

"Troops!" cried Pietro, in surprise. "What troops can be here at this time?"

"I don't know," replied Bernardo. "I didn't see them. They were stout rascals, our informant said, and led by doughty knights. They may have been Milanese."

"I don't think so, Bernardo."

"Why not?"

"Because I have just come from Milan, and none



of the troops are absent from that city. More likely they were from the north. But is it known that they were after us?"

"It is known that they had been making inquiries about us, and that they were coming directly towards us. However, I have not seen them yet, and I know not where they are. In all probability they have pushed on to the south."

"Not by the road to Milan," said Pietro, "or I should have met them."

"Well, it makes no difference. They have gone somewhere; and we may as well follow on after our companions."

"You are right, Bernardo."

"Unless," said Bernardo, "you have some other plan."

"What other plan can I have?"

"I don't know. I suppose you have seen the Duke of Milan?"

"Yes."

"Well—I thought, if he had paid you the reward—"

"Ha, ha! you are witty, Bernardo. If I had a hundred golden sequins, you fancy that you and I might find use for it, eh?"

"I didn't say so."

"I know—but I think you meant it. However, I haven't got them; so we have nothing to do but to draw our reins, and find our captain."

It was nearly dark when the two robbers set out, and as the path was a narrow and dubious one, they were forced to move slowly. They found their com-



panions in a deep wood near the hills of Cantu, and when they had dismounted and secured their horses, it was almost morning.

By a large rock, where a mass of vines were woven almost to the form of a tent, lay Orlando Vendorme bound hand and foot, with a sentinel keeping watch over him. As the first beams of morning struggled in through the thick foliage, he awoke from a troubled slumber, and asked the guard to loosen the bond upon his arm.

But the fellow would not do it.

"My chieftain gave me no such orders," he said. "Wait till he comes."

"Will you not call him? Tell him, if he means to kill me, he should do it at once, and not rack me thus."

"Hold—here he comes. Now you can ask him."

A dark-visaged, powerfully framed man, wearing an ostrich plume in his velvet cap, approached the spot where the prisoner sat. This was Lanzilla, the chief of the robbers. He had, in former years, been a knight of Mantua; but a great crime had subjected him to the loss of his spurs; and, seeking the Alpine banditti, he had joined their number, and finally risen to be their leader. He stood by the prisoner's side, and looked down into his pain-marked face.

"Orlando Vendorme," he said, "do you remember when you were first banished from Milan, that you met me by the bank of the Saveso?"

"Yes," replied our hero; "I remember it very well."



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“And do you remember the proposition I then made to you?”

“Yes.”

“If you had accepted it, you would not have been where you now are.”

“Perhaps not.”

“No,—you would have been a free and independent man, owing allegiance to no earthly monarch; and only governed by a chief of your own choice. But your choice was not with us. Perhaps you remember the next time you met me?”

“Yes,” said Orlando. “I helped a party of gentlemen whom you had attacked; and I suppose you now intend to have ample revenge.”

“Ah,” returned Lanzilla, shaking his head slowly from side to side, “I don’t know how that may be. If you were left wholly at my disposal, I think I should offer you once more an opportunity to join us.”

“You would offer in vain.”

“Then you are the greater fool. I tell you, Master Vendorme, the time is not far distant when our free band will be able to shake the petty thrones of Lombardy. However, you need not fret yourself with the idea of loss, for I could not make you the offer if I would. You are not my prisoner.”

“Whose am I, then?”

“Perhaps I speak a little wide of the mark, sir knight. You are my prisoner, but not held for my use. I hold you for the present; but I hold you subject to the orders of another.”



"Subject to the orders of the tyrant of Milan, is it?"

"If you will have it so—yes."

"And will you conduct me to him?"

"Not yet."

"What will you do?"

"Ere long you shall see."

"One word, sir," cried the captive, as Lanzilla turned to move away. "Will you not loosen the bond upon my arms?"

"Yes,—but not now!"

What did he mean? Why did he answer so abruptly, and stride away so suddenly? What was to be done? Orlando turned to a man who stood near, and asked him which way they meant to move. The man looked at him, and shook his head, vouchsafing no other answer.

In a little while the robber chieftain returned, accompanied by two of his companions. He looked more stern than before, and upon his brow there was a dark scowl.

"Orlando Vendorme," he said, "I had thought of sending you your way without giving you any notice thereof; but my companions have overruled me. For my part, I forgive you for the work you once did against us; but not so with the others. My lieutenant leads in the determination to make you suffer."

"Aye," interposed a stout, dark-visaged man, moving forward as he spoke, "I have not forgotten that my own brother fell by this fellow's hands. I am not so forgiving."



"Nor I," added another of the robbers. "This man struck us without provocation. We had never harmed him. He smote down the dearest friend I ever had."

"You see," said Lanzilla, "what the feeling is."

"Aye," replied our hero, "I see it very plainly; but you have not told me what is to be my fate."

"Your fate is—DEATH!"

Vendorme was startled with horror. Such a thought had floated through his mind, but he had not given it reflection. He looked around upon the dark, stern faces of those who gathered about him, and he saw little there of sympathy.

"Do you mean that you will murder me?" he asked.

"No," replied the chieftain; "we have no such thought. We are to execute you. It is the order of the Duke of Milan that you die, and I am to send your head to him. This it was which I did not mean to tell you; but my men were clamorous to see you suffer. Had the matter been left for me to carry out at will, I would have put you to rest with the prick of a javelin, and saved you all contemplation of your doom. Still, sir, I can grant you one favor: You may choose in what manner you will die."

"In the name of that honor which is the part of every brave man," cried Orlando, "I appeal to you—"

"Stop," said the robber, with a wave of the hand; "don't misunderstand me. I have nothing whatever to do with your death, or with your life. I did not capture you, nor am I responsible. You were taken



by my companions—they took you by order of the duke—and by order of the duke you are to die. I tell you this so that you shall not carry out of the world with you the thought that Lanzilla sought such revenge. I make no secrets, because you cannot bear tales from here. Now speak, if you have a choice. How will you die?”

The bound knight looked around once more, but he saw no friend. All within the gloom of the deep wood—the gaze of the robbers; the heavy shadows; the gnarled and twisted trunks of the great old trees; the sighing wind; all seemed to bear to him record of his doom.

“I have no choice,” he said.

“Reflect.”

“There is no need of reflection. An expression of choice would be a recognition of my fate. I have no hand in it. If I must be murdered to satisfy the demand of a base tyrant, he who does the coward deed may have the choice of means.”

“Then,” resumed the chieftain, “I will myself give the decision. The blow that takes your life shall give us your head.”

As Lanzilla turned towards his lieutenant, apparently to give some order touching the execution, the robbers were startled by the footfall of a horse; and presently a stranger rode up to the spot where the band had been encamped. A messenger was dispatched to ascertain who the intruder was, and when he returned he reported that Marco Pazzoli sought the missing knight.

“It is the hunter, is it?” said Lanzilla.



"Yes."

"The one who led the princess to the cavern?"

"Yes."

"Is he alone?"

"Yes."

"Then go and secure him. Bind him hand and foot, and if he makes any disturbance, gag him,—choke him, if need be."

Four of the robbers went to execute this command, and when their work had been done, Lanzilla turned once more to his lieutenant.

"You have a stout arm, and a sharp sword."

"Yes," was the answer.

"And you will strike for the duke?"

"Aye, and for vengeance, too!"

"Then bring the block. This work shall be quickly done; and then we'll send to Manfred of Milan his pannier of fruit! He will not get it so soon as it was promised; but it may be none the less acceptable for that."

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### GUESTS WHO WERE NOT INVITED.

Rosabel of Bergamo could find no means of escape from the fate which had been pronounced by her guardian. She had exhausted every resource of thought and invention without effect. The day had



come which had been appointed, and she was at the mercy of the tyrant. All night she had been awake, meditating upon her fearful doom ; and with the light of morning she threw herself upon her couch, resolved to bear up as best she could. She had prayed to Heaven for strength, and she believed she had received it—strength to support her through the coming ordeal, and strength to give her passage from the danger beyond. She might be called the wife of Ludovico—she could see no way to avoid it ; but she hoped that she might never prove false to her true love.

She lay thus upon her couch, with her face buried in her hands, when the duke was announced.

“Let him come in,” she said ; and she arose and met him in the chamber.

“How is this ?” he demanded, when he saw her pale face and her dishevelled hair. “Are you thinking of escape ?”

“No, my lord—not of escape by force of my own. If my prayers cannot move you, I have no hope.”

“Bah ! We have had enough of that. His Holiness is here, and all is ready for the marriage. You must join us as soon as you can. And, lady, remember this : No failure on your part can delay these services. Should you faint, even, and sink upon your bed, the work should be done nevertheless.”

“I understand you, sir,” replied the princess, standing erect, and speaking with much resolution. “I shall not seek to make myself more uncomfortable



than you have already planned. I am not blind enough to suppose that the famished wolf can be driven from his prey by the timid, helpless lamb. I know that you seek to unite the houses of Bergamo and Milan—that you are determined to possess for your son the wealth and power thus gained ; and as it can only come to you by my hand, I know that I must surrender. I am ready, sir ; and I only ask that you will cause the ceremonies to be as brief as possible.”

The duke exhibited no anger at the maiden's freedom of speech. He was rather pleased than otherwise by her surrender.

“Can you be ready in half an hour ?” he asked.

“If Blanche can come and help me.”

Manfred promised to send the girl ; and shortly after he withdrew she came.

“My dear lady,” Blanche said, with tears in her eyes, “I cannot help you. We are watched upon all hands, and—”

“Stop,” interrupted the princess. “I only wish you to help me dress. The time for other help is gone. But I would ask you one question : Do you know if anything has been heard from Orlando Vendorme ?”

“I have heard nothing.”

“That is all. You may bring my dress now.”

The girl proceeded with her work in silence, and when her mistress was arrayed in her bridal robes she stood back and wiped her eyes.

“I wish to be alone a moment, Blanche.”

The attendant withdrew to the bed-room, and then



Rosabel went to her dressing-case, and took from a secret drawer the little dagger which Vendorme had given to her.

"This may be my last friend of earth!" she murmured, as she gazed upon the sharp, glittering point. The wicked prince of Milan shall never know Rosabel as a wife—NEVER!"

She hid the dagger in her bosom, and not long afterwards a messenger arrived from the duke.

\* \* \* \* \*

John XVII., the Pope of Rome, stood by the duke's side in the apartment where it had been arranged that the marriage ceremony should be performed.

"Ha, ha," said Manfred, as the sound of distant tumult fell upon his ear, "my people are already making merry on the occasion. They shall have a glorious time of it when the marriage is over."

"You have made arrangement for sports, then?"

"No, the prince has made them. I have thought best that Ludovico should please the people this time."

"A wise thought," said the Pope. "It is well to keep them busy with something. Ah—here comes the prince."

Ludovico, accompanied by Hugh de Castro and several other officers of the ducal household, entered the apartment, and were presented to His Holiness.

In a little while, by another door, entered Rosabel of Bergamo with two attendants. The duke approached her and introduced the Pope.



"Rosabel, this is our holy father, John."

From an impulse of her nature, regarding the papal office as something holy and worshipful, she bowed her head down, and crossed her arms upon her bosom. The Pope placed his hand upon her, and uttered a blessing, after which he said :

"My daughter, it gives me joy to greet you; and you will allow me to congratulate you upon the bright prospect that opens before you."

"I think we are ready," said Manfred.

"All ready," replied Ludovico, at the same time advancing and taking the princess by the hand. He was startled when he found how cold her hand was, but he made no remark upon it.

The herald made proclamation to the effect that Rosabel of Bergamo was to be united in marriage to Ludovico of Milan. He did not ask if any were present who could give a just reason why the marriage should not take place, but in the stead thereof, he said:

"And to this union the Pope of Rome hath given holy sanction, so let no man object, neither now, nor hereafter !"

The Pope now advanced to where the couple stood, and in a very few moments he had pronounced them man and wife. Rosabel had not opened her lips. The usual questions were asked, but her silence was not heeded. Willing, or unwilling, she was given to Ludovico, and the papal-benediction was pronounced upon the union !

"Keep her not here," whispered the prince, turning to one of the female attendants. "Convey her



to her apartments as quickly as possible." He saw that she was very weak, and he feared that she might faint in the presence of the witnesses.

But Rosabel did not faint there. With a firm step she walked from the room, her right hand clutching something that she carried in her bosom.

"Now," cried the duke, clapping his hands, "the work is done! Ha—and the people are shouting again. They know that the time hath arrived. De Castro, let proclamation be made from the towers that the prince is married!"

"It seems to me, my lord, that the rascals are taking some liberty," said the captain, as a furious shout rent the air.

"Aye," added Ludovico, clenching his fist, "and they seem to be crowding into the palace. Did you invite them to the marriage feast?"

"No," returned Manfred. "I have left all that for you to do."

"But they are coming. Hark! they are even now upon the stairs."

"De Castro," ordered the duke, stamping his foot impatiently, "go and drive the villains back!"

The captain turned to obey the command, but ere he had taken many steps, the large door was thrown open, and a score of armed knights came tramping into the apartment.

"How now!" exclaimed the duke, quivering from head to foot. He was angry, and he was frightened, too.

The first to advance and speak was the Saxon knight, Frederic Von Brunt.



"Manfred of Milan," he said, striking his mailed hand upon his hip, "we have come to set free a prisoner."

"Insolent!" cried Ludovico, turning pale with rage.

"Nevertheless," resumed Von Brunt, "our work must be done. We demand the person of—"

"I have him not," said the duke, speaking before his time.

"Have not whom?"

"That dog of a Vendorme. You will have to seek elsewhere for him."

"Ah, my lord duke, you anticipate too much," replied the stout Saxon, with a smile. "It is not of Orlando Vendorme that we are now in search. I think, however, that you have been expecting some slight return from the person of that gallant champion. Is it not so?"

"It matters not what I have expected," answered Manfred, clutching nervously at his sword-hilt.

"Never mind," continued Von Brunt. "When you hear from Vendorme, the message will not come as you have been expecting. But now another person is meant. We demand of you Rosabel of Bergamo."

"Death and perdition," yelled the duke, stamping his foot till the very walls rang, "am I to be bearded thus? What means this outrageous intrusion? De Castro, call in my guard! Bid my men-at-arms attend me here! I'll teach these dogs a lesson!"

"Easy, my lord duke," said the Saxon, unsheathing his sword as he spoke, "You see we have the



advantage here. Your captain cannot move, save at our pleasure."

"Frederic Von Brunt speaks truly," spoke another of the knights, advancing from his companions.

"Alfonso of Modena, is it you?"

"Yes, Manfred," replied the count.

"Then," cried the duke, moving back a step, "to perdition with the whole of you! Down, down, base men—down upon your knees! You are in the presence of the Pope!"

Upon being thus introduced, John XVII. approached, and spread out his arms towards the intruding knights.

"Not now," said Von Brunt, coolly waving the pontiff back. "The presence of the Pope cannot be allowed to interfere with the business we have in hand."

As John moved slowly away, the duke turned and whispered to one of his attendants, who immediately afterwards slipped out by a side door. Von Brunt saw the movement, but he did not see fit to interfere.

"My lord duke," he said, "I once more demand of you the princess Rosabel. If you do not bring her, I shall send for her."

"Wait—wait," replied Manfred. "You shall have your answer soon enough."

Just then the attendant, who had gone out by the side door but a moment before, returned, pale and trembling.

"How now, dog! Where are the guard? Where are the archers?"



"My lord," returned the messenger, quivering more than before, "the guard are all under restraint and the archers are drawn up under command of Michael Totilla, who refuses to obey any order save such as shall come from Frederic Von Brunt."

"By the Lord of Lords!" gasped Manfred, clenching his fists, and stamping upon the floor, "this is some base conspiracy! I'll have my guardsmen here if I have to cut the cordon with my own sword. Stand back, dogs! Stand back, I say!"

"I see we are to have little choice in this matter," said Von Brunt. "Where is Gaspard?"

"Here, Sir Frederic," replied the Saxon esquire, stepping forward,

"Go and call the armorer, and bid him follow you with a score of his men."

As Gaspard went out, the Saxon knight turned again to the duke.

"My Lord Duke of Milan, you shall soon be answered to your satisfaction. If you think it best to try the virtue of your sword, you can have ample accommodation, but I would advise you to remain quiet."

Like a man who moved from some deadly danger unseen, did the duke stagger back, and rest the point of his sword upon the floor.

Twice had Ludovico started to move forward, and both times had de Castro caught him by the sleeve.

"No, no, my lord," the captain whispered, as he drew the prince back the second time. "I would not oppose them yet. If they seek the princess—



which I imagine is some of Alfonso's doing—they will be thwarted at the very moment when they deem their success most sure. Let them do their will."

The prince stood back, for he could not but see that he and his friends were no match for the stout knights of Saxony and Modena.

In a little while Gaspard returned, and with him came Michael Totilla, followed by a score of stout men-at-arms.

"Michael," spoke Von Brunt, moving back a pace, and waving his hand towards the duke and his companions, "secure these gentlemen. They are all your prisoners, save him who wears the vestments of the Pope."

At first both Manfred and Ludovico prepared for resistance, but when they saw how useless such demonstration must be, they surrendered, though with ill grace, and with many bitter curses.

When this had been done, Von Brunt turned again to the esquire, who presently introduced into the apartment Hippolita and Cinthia. When de Castro saw his bondwoman with the wife of the armorer, he broke out into a muttering of curses, but no attention was paid to him.

"Now," said Sir Frederic, addressing the women, "we will have the princess. Do you find her and bring her hither."

"By the fiends of darkness !" exclaimed Ludovico, "I think I have a right here !"

He would have spoken farther, but de Castro plucked him again by the sleeve.



"Keep quiet, my lord," the captain whispered. "Let them bring her if they will. They are only working to their own disappointment. When they have her here they shall find that she is your wife, made so by the Pope himself."

The prince stood back, and Hippolita and Cinthia left the apartment.

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## CHAPTER XX.

### CONCLUSION.

Rosabel sat alone in her chamber, still clad in her bridal robes ; and in her hand she held the dagger, which she had looked upon as her last source of relief from the terrible doom which had been pronounced upon her. It was a fearful thought—the taking of her own life ; but she believed God would pardon her for the deed. She sat thus, murmuring a prayer to Heaven, when her door was opened ; and upon looking up she beheld Hippolita and Cinthia. The dagger dropped from her hand, and she started to her feet.

"My dear, dear lady," cried Hippolita, seizing the princess by the hand. "O, you must suffer no more. Come—you must go with us. We have been sent to bring you into the presence of friends."

"Merciful Heaven !" gasped Rosabel, leaning upon the bondwoman's shoulder for support, "what mean you ? Who are my friends ?"



"Gaspard of Saxony is here," replied Hippolita ; "and Sir Frederick Von Brunt ; and Ludwig Eberhard ; and Alfonso of Modena. Are not they your friends ?"

"Yes—yes," said Rosabel, in a deep, startling whisper. "But is there another ? Is there one more ?"

"Do you mean Vendorme ?"

"Yes."

"He is safe, lady. But—what ails you ? Speak—what is it ! Are you faint ?"

"O ! God have mercy !" the princess groaned resting her head upon Hippolita's bosom. "O ! my poor, poor life ! This is worse than death !"

"What—what, lady ? No, no,—you must not fail now. Come—come with us ; and all may yet be well. They are friends who wish to see you—friends who are able to help you."

"No, no," murmured Rosabel, in tones of deepest anguish ; "for me there is help no more on earth. The hour for help is passed. Had you come just one hour sooner—one poor, short hour—there might have been hope for the power of friendship. But," the princess added, looking up, and trying to stand without assistance, "what is this strange thing which has happened ?"

"I don't understand it myself," replied Hippolita ; "but perhaps Cinthia can tell you something about it."

"I can tell you thus much," said the wife of the armorer : A little past the hour of noon, while the people were waiting for the announcement of your



marriage with the prince, a large cavalcade of knights entered the city by the eastern gate. They were led by Frederic Von Brunt, who seemed to be seconded by the Count of Modena. Whence came their wondrous power I know not; but this I do know; no sooner had they presented themselves to the guards and soldiers than the latter bowed before them, and acknowledged their authority; and thus the very arms upon which the duke might depend for help were turned against him. My husband was called upon, and ordered to take command of the duke's archers, subject to the order of Von Brunt; and Hippolita and myself were ordered to come hither to attend upon the Lady Rosabel. There is something very strange, my dear lady—something which I cannot explain. But come—I think they are waiting for you. Will you not go with us?"

"The hour of help is past for me; but I will go with you. I am ready." And, supported by a dim, shapeless possibility of succor, the princess accompanied the messengers from her chamber.

When the females reached the apartment where the ducal party had been left, they found the knights anxiously waiting for them. Alfonso of Modena stepped quickly forward, and took the princess by the hand.

"Fair cousin," he said, "we have come to help you, and I trust that we are not too late. See—I think here comes one whom you can trust."

As he spoke, the princess looked up and saw, advancing from an open door, Orlando Vendorme.



But she did not move to meet him. She turned to Hippolita, and bowed her head upon her shoulder.

"O!" she groaned, "this is dreadful. Let me go to my chamber. I am lost! lost! lost!"

"Death and condemnation!" gasped the duke, when he saw the youthful champion. "Has this dog come back?"

"Ah, Manfred of Milan," said Von Brunt, with a mocking sneer, "you don't see the head of the gallant knight in the place where you expected to see it. But never mind; it is much better as it is, and if you will listen, I will tell you how it has happened. We knights of Saxony, with these noble knights of Wirtemberg and of Bavaria, and with the count of Modena and his right noble knights, have had business in this section of Lombardy. This morning, led by a mountain hunter, we came upon a camp of robbers, and were just in season to save the life of Sir Orlando. Our guide had gone on in advance, and when we arrived we found him bound to a tree, while the villains were making ready to cut off the head of our noble knight. We were in season, thank God! and Vendorme is safe."

"Well, sir, and what of all this?" asked the duke, making a powerful effort to stand up like a ruler. "You have come in force, and, by some strange means gained access to my palace in numbers sufficient to hold me under restraint for a season, but what is it going to benefit you?"

"It may not benefit me at all," replied Von Brunt. "We have come for the benefit of another. We have



come to release Rosabel of Bergamo from your base guardianship."

"And perhaps," said Manfred, with a sneer, "you meditate bestowing her hand upon Vendorme?"

"It may be so, my lord duke."

"Ha, ha, ha—you are late this time! You may have been in season to snatch Vendorme from the hands of those who would have executed a righteous sentence upon him, but you are not in season to take Rosabel of Bergamo. She has been married, sir! She is the wife of Ludovico!"

"But she was married against her will."

"She was married by his holiness the Pope, whose edict is sacred above all other earthly things. So now, sir knight of Saxony, you have it."

"I have said all I have to say," returned Von Brunt, "and I will now introduce one who may speak to you with more authority. Gaspard, our master is wanted."

The esquire went out, and in a few moments returned, followed by the fair-haired youth whom we have known as Theodore of Hartburg, and with him came a man of middle age, whose garb bespoke him an officer of holy order.

"Make way for the Emperor!" said Alfonso of Modena, at the same time removing his casque and bowing his head, which example was followed by all the noble knights.

"The EMPEROR!" gasped Manfred, trembling at every joint.

"The EMPEROR!" echoed John XVII., turning pale as death.



"Yes," said the smooth-faced youth, standing erect before them, and throwing open his doublet, beneath which, upon his breast, flashed the imperial star of Charlemagne. "I am Otho of Germany. I am he who makes and unmakes the princes of Lombardy. Aye, and I am more than that, as you shall see anon. Base tyrant, thou art no longer duke of Milan. When my father gave the scepter into thy hands, he hoped thou wouldst have ruled with justice, but thou hast not done it, and I cast thee out, and the dukedom is no more. To Orlando Vendorme, a just and honorable man, I give the government of this city and its dependencies, and do create him COUNT OF MILAN. And furthermore, upon him do I bestow the hand of Rosabel of Bergamo."

"No, no," cried Ludovico, "you cannot do that; Rosabel is my wife."

"When married?" demanded the emperor.

"This very day."

"Fair cousin," said Otho, turning to the princess, who was leaning upon Hippolita for support, "was it of your own free will and accord that you gave your hand to Ludovico?"

"No, no," answered Rosabel, starting up. "I was forced through it all, and not one promise did I make. In my soul, and before Heaven, I am not a wife!"

"But," ventured Ludovico, grasping at the last hope, "his holiness, the Pope, made her my wife, and his holy edict must stand."

"I told you," said Otho, "that I could do more than make and unmake princes. *I make and unmake*



*Popes!* Base, false man," he continued, turning to John XVII., "your career of vice and infamy is run, and your plots against the Emperor Otho have come to nought. I was in Rome not many days ago, where I cast the conspiring Consul into prison, and deposed you from the pontifical throne. And, sir, you behold the true Pope by my side. My faithful friend and teacher, the good Gerbert, has been raised to the holy seat, and I know that Christendom will be blessed in the change I have made. You can go back to your cloister of St. Marti, and there remain, in penance, through the rest of your days. What you have done, as Pope, since you left Rome six days ago, is null and void. Frederic Von Brunt, let him be taken hence, and do you see that he has safe escort to his convent!"

When the trembling man had been led from the apartment, Otho turned to Rosabel.

"Now, sweet cousin," he said, "you shall wear smiles upon your face once more. You are not a wife, for he that professed to marry you was without authority. Still, I think there is one present to whom you would willingly give your hand. Am I not right?"

As he spoke the Emperor had advanced and extended his hand, and as the princess grasped it she bowed her head, murmuring, as she did so:

"Yes, sire. To one who is noble and true have I given my heart and pledged my lasting love."

"It is to Orlando Vendorme?"

"Yes."



"Then the work shall be finished where it has begun, and Manfred and his son shall behold the consummation. Come, Sir Orlando, and let me thus make full payment of the debt I owe thee." He took the hand of the knight, and when he had placed within it the hand of Rosabel of Bergamo, he turned to Gerbert : "Holy father, we await your benediction."

The new-made Pope moved forward, and when he had spoken those magic words which made Orlando Vendorme and Rosabel man and wife, the happy couple knelt before him and received his blessing.

Then, by order of the Emperor, Manfred and Ludovico, and Hugh de Castro, with their immediate attendants, were removed from the apartment, and preparations were made for such a celebration as was fitting to the occasion.

When news was carried to the people that Manfred and Ludovico were in prison, and that Orlando Vendorme had been made ruler in Milan, and that Rosabel of Bergamo had been made his wife, such shouts of joy went up from the old city as had not been heard within its walls for long, long years.

Our story of the Outcast is told, and we have only to add a few words touching the fates of those with whom we have become acquainted during the recital.

Manfred and Ludovico were removed to Germany, where they both died in prison. Hugh de Castro was liberated on condition that he would leave Milan forever.



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Michael Totilla was made captain of the guard, and right well did he fill the office. In time he won the golden spur, and few were the knights who cared to meet him in the list.

Otho III., crowned Emperor at the age of three years, and crowned King of Rome at the age of fifteen, was one of the wisest and most honorable monarchs of his time. The warm friendship which prompted him to elevate his old tutor, Gerbert, to the papal chair, as Gregory V., was extended to further acts ; and during the latter part of his reign, he so extended the power of the Pope, that, in after times, the See of Rome was able to dispute for temporal sovereignty with his imperial successors.

Milan and Bergamo, united under the sway of Orlando and Rosabel, enjoyed a season of prosperity such as was rarely known in Lombardy ; for the happy prince, whose home was the abode of so much pure joy, knew well how to make joy for his subjects.

THE END.



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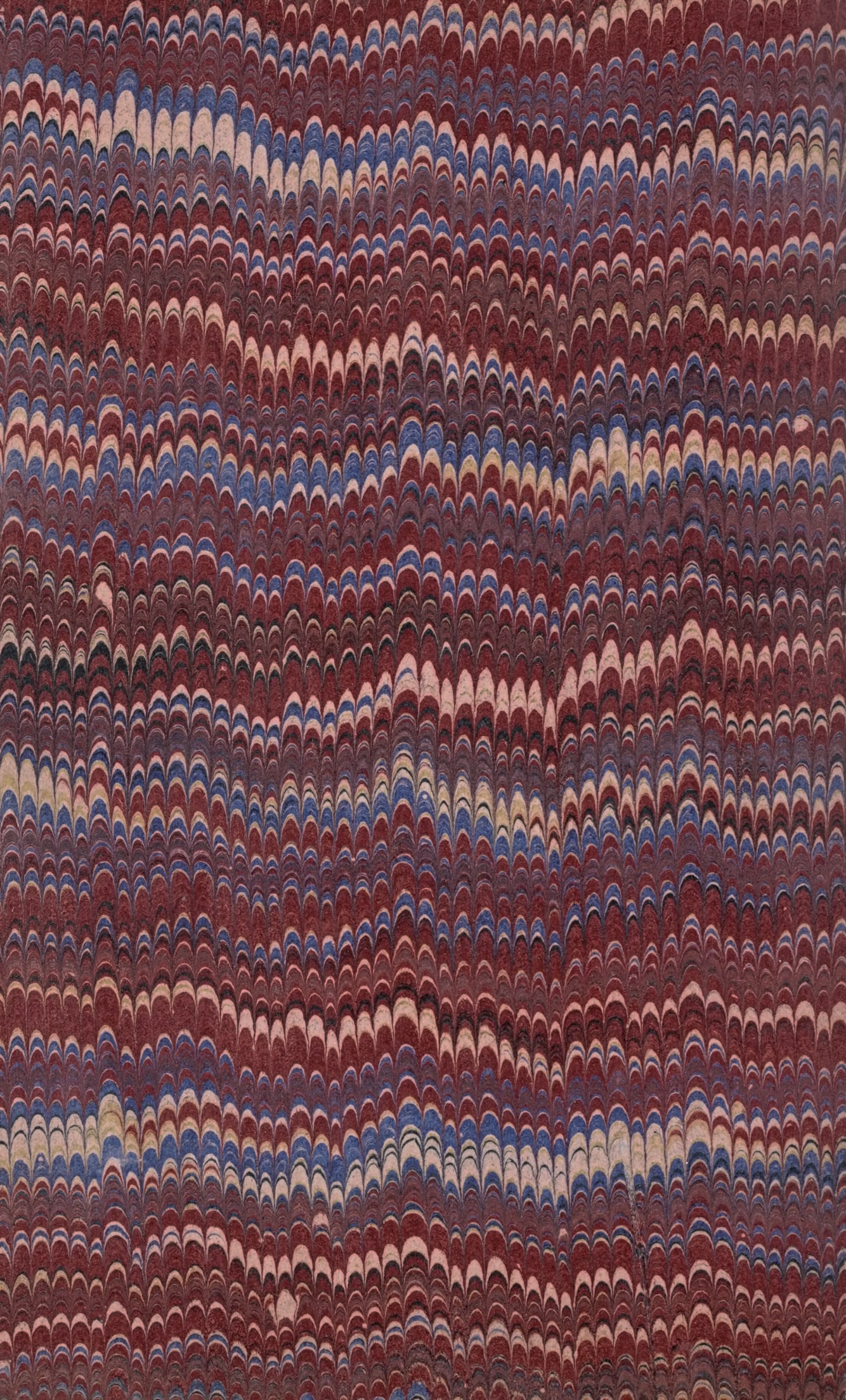




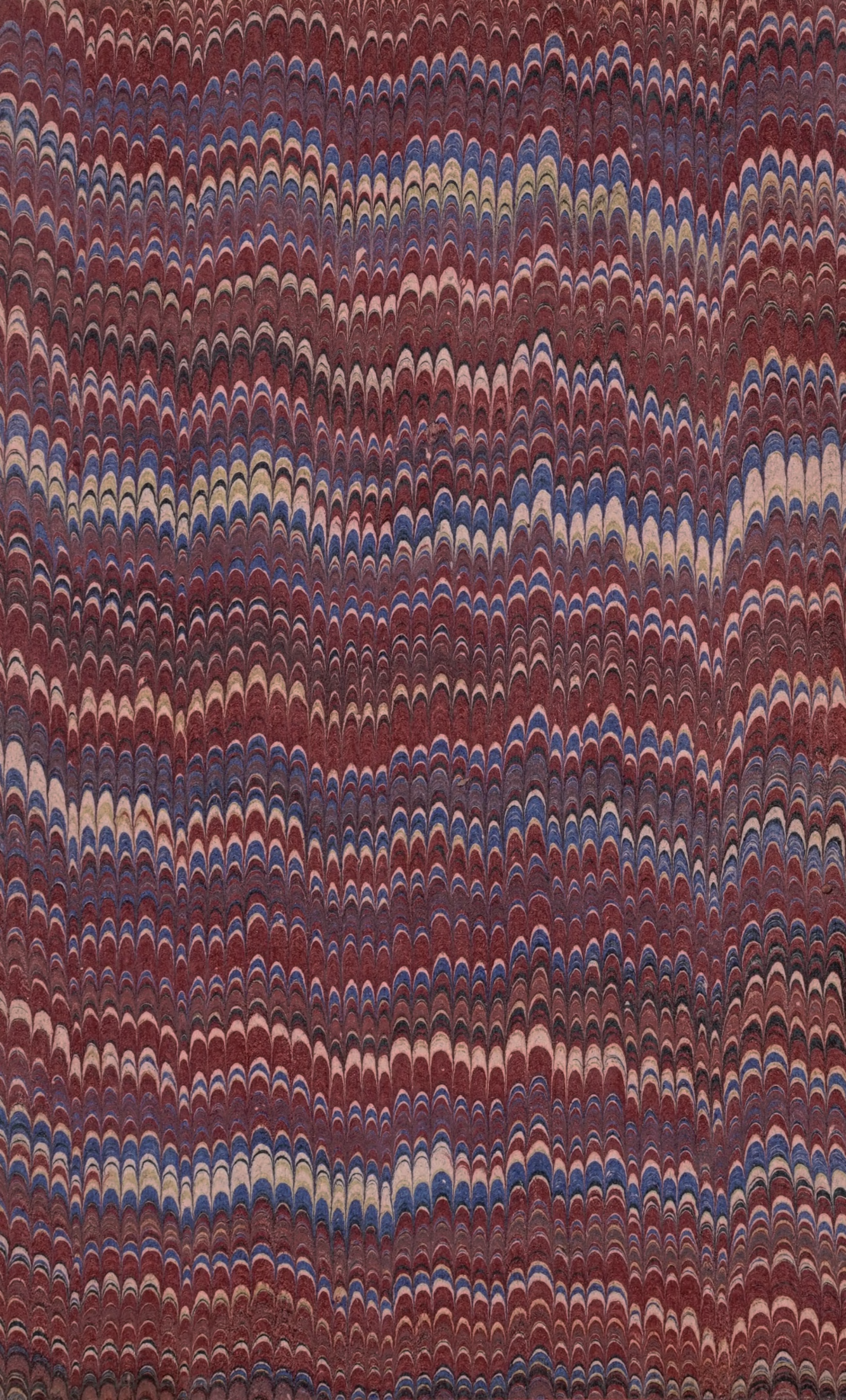














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